

Safety Cop



On-Job Safety: Go With OSHA, Do It Yourself, But Just Do It!

Rather than avoiding the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA), more businesses use the federal agency's voluntary compliance programs to make their work places safer. OSHA actively seeks participants. NYSIF safety group manager Lovell Safety Management has signed an agreement with OSHA to promote work place safety, especially for small business.

There are certainly benefits to working with OSHA, such as receiving authoritative advice on complying with laws and standards, along with removal from targeted inspections. Some companies, though, are reluctant to partner with a regulator. They might not wish to undergo mandatory operational review, required by these programs. Some don't want to risk discovery of imminent dangers or serious hazards, forcing OSHA back into a regulatory role.

At a minimum, participation requires a safety program review, active management leadership and employee involvement, correction of all hazards as noted on a joint inspection with OSHA, and compliance with all OSHA safety and health standards, nothing less than what NYSIF emphasizes as part of an effective safety program.

THE SELF-IMPROVEMENT OPTION

Self-improvement is another option, as long as you make the commitment. Basic principles guide all successful safety programs — those found in voluntary OSHA programs and also in New York's mandatory Industrial Code Rule 59 for larger, high-loss employers.

Thorough self-evaluation is the first step:

- Review incident and accident records to determine what kinds of injuries have occurred in the past two to three years to find out who is getting hurt and why. Look for trends: similar job types, body parts injured, seasonal factors, tools or machines used, level of worker experience.
- Give your existing safety program an honest evaluation. Is it effective, in writing and enforced?

Who provides safety training? Do you document it? Are accident rates going up or down? Look at accident frequency as well as severity.

- Does your company's safety culture (attitudes, beliefs and actions) encourage safe behavior? Do you know what physical hazards exist, and if employees engage in unsafe work practices? Do employees report hazards or unsafe acts, is there a mechanism for reporting them, and how does your company react to reported safety problems?
- Consider how to improve your program: More employee participation or management involvement? Better supervisory accountability? Better machine guarding? Safety training? Do workers embrace or resist safety efforts?

TAKE ACTION!

Action plans list individual steps to improve safety, from improved housekeeping, identifying and labeling hazardous chemicals, implementing a back safety program, or developing an evacuation plan, to scheduling regular safety meetings, toolbox talks and training on safe work practices. Action plans differ from "to-do" lists; each action item lists a target date for completion and who's accountable.

Target dates and accountability mean little without management follow-up. Encourage employee participation (a key to all successful safety programs, especially OSHA's). Communicate expectations to employees, supervisors and managers. Update your plan and publicize complete items. This can drive safety improvements.

GET OUTSIDE HELP

NYSIF's free publication, *Partners in Safety*, offers basic advice in key safe work practices. NYSIF's web site has additional safety and risk management information. Trade groups, associations, OSHA's web site and its partnerships and alliances can provide invaluable resources: Learn as much as you can about how others in your industry prevent accidents. Unions may be a surprising source of support in unionized shops.

In choosing how to improve your safety record, a lot depends on the extent of your existing safety program. As in other areas of life, when it comes to safety partnerships, compatibility is the key.

Safety & Risk Management

