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Technical Article

Technical Article Content Pulled from the NIBA Belt Line Newsletter

Safety in the Workplace

Contributed by Sparks Belting Company

Beltline Reprint September 2011

NIBA members spend hundreds, thousands, and possibly millions of dollars on preventative safety practices and procedures. However, it is equally important to also develop a Culture of Safety within your organization that allows your employees to maintain safety inside and outside of work.

The trend around safety culture originated after the Chernobyl disaster brought attention to the importance of safety culture and the impact managers have on developing and communicating this culture.

Since then, a number of definitions of safety culture have been published. Some of the definitions include that the safety culture of an organization is the product of individual and group values, attitudes, perceptions, competencies and patterns of behavior that determine the commitment to, and the style and proficiency of, an organization's health and safety management.

The conveyor belt business demands that we deeply root a safety culture in our work places and employees so that it can be part of and extend outside of our workplace. A good safety culture should encompass our employee's safety during travel, sales calls, surveys, production work, and field service.

Industry customers range in all kinds of sizes from very small facilities and processing, to very complex organizations that are fortune 500 companies. The safety programs and requirements may vary dramatically from one to the next. So, whether it's a sales person visiting the customer or a full installation crew that might be on sight, knowing, being aware, and in some cases exceeding the safety requirements is everyone's responsibility.

Safety culture can be expressed in terms of attitudes or behavior and work activity. In other words, the safety culture of an organization acts as a guide for how employees will behave in the workplace, at installations as well as in their homes. Of course their behavior will be influenced or determined by what behaviors are rewarded and acceptable within the workplace.

Characteristics of a Positive Safety Culture

One could argue a good safety culture might both reflect and be promoted by at least four factors. These four factors might include senior management commitment to safety, shared care and concern for hazards and their impacts on people, realistic and flexible norms and rules about hazards, and continual reflection upon practice through monitoring, analysis and feedback systems. Leadership is the key to affecting a safety culture.



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1. Management's Commitment: The foundation of any culture within a business starts at the management level. Since NIBA members vary greatly from owner operators to large corporations, it's a great reminder of where a safety culture starts. To be effective, management must make it part of the daily language, monitor the measurement, celebrate successes and hold team members accountable.
2. Overall concern and care for hazards and the impact on people: This is where the “rubber hits the road”. A manufacturer or distributor can have multiple safety programs in place but if they are not acted upon on a continuous and regular basis, a culture will not be visible and therefore the risks are high. The people that work in our industry are the heart of the industry so making sure that safety programs are robust and secure are very important.
3. Realistic and flexible norms and rules about hazards. It's vital to know and follow all regulations that could apply to your business if a safety culture is important. The minimum requirements consist of being familiar with and abiding by the laws. Then in addition, reviewing all aspects of your business for specifics that may need to be addressed will only make your business that much better.
4. Monitoring, analysis and feedback systems. Make learning part of your process. Creating measurements, utilizing visuals, having open discussions, and monitoring the results will drive a safer culture at your place of business. There are many resources available and there are many publications that can assist with some of the particulars.

An organization's culture develops over a period of months and years and cannot be created at a moment in time. If leadership, time, money, and programs are part of a company's investment a true safety culture will be well on its way to making a safer work place and world for everyone.