Five steps to improving your workplace safety culture

By Eric Glass, Senior Advisor, EHS

No matter what industry you're in, today's workplace safety issues are a minefield of daily challenges. Modern workplaces have a continually fluctuating workforce, including temporary or gig employees, new or evolving technology and a heightened understanding of the indirect costs of an unsafe workplace, like lost productivity. Industrial health and safety initiatives have never been more critical.

Over 25 years of experience as a safety advisor, I have seen shocking examples of unsafe facilities and practices. These examples have led me to one key point. Ultimately, at the core of a strong safety program is a strong safety culture.

Fiscally and ethically, building a culture of safety matters. It helps:

- Reduce the number and severity of incidents through a more educated, aware workforce
- Standardize and increase safety program efficiency
- Improve morale, employee retention and job satisfaction

My guess is that you've already seen the other side on-the-job injuries and too many incidents where productivity stalls and employees are at risk.

So, let us show you how to get back on track, starting today.

UL can help you create a safer and more productive environment for your employees.

Configure your company culture

Your organization's culture is how your company works. We are not telling you to tear it down to the studs and rebuild. Instead, you can commit to the less daunting task of improving safety in your already existing company culture.

Avoid promoting safety measures with mandates and ultimatums

Even with the most proactive and robust health and safety program, accidents still occur. Imperfect work systems and working environments influence how workers approach safety. Telling employees to "follow these rules or you'll get fired," as some companies have done, isn't an effective strategy in achieving a safe and healthy occupational environment.

Your employees are your true experts; they know what really happens in day-to-day operations. Trust them by:

- Giving your company credit for hiring well-intentioned employees
- Promoting effective corrective and preventive actions in a positive stance
- Involving employees who are directly and indirectly involved in specific safety initiatives
- Encouraging workers to report observation and near misses, be part of incident investigations, lead training sessions for their peers and be active in safety committees
- Establishing open and honest communication with employees to identify, understand and address current or emerging safety issues or concerns
- Focusing on enhancing work systems and environmental factors surrounding good employees

Avoid implementing a safety program without first giving it structure

Establishing a written safety program is not as simple as filling a binder with safety-related policies, rules and procedures. It must provide a systematic approach to safety and health management. Your safety program should be divided into four sections:

- Management, leadership and employee involvement (who is accountable for what)
- Worksite analysis (recognizing and understanding existing and potential workplace hazards)
- Hazard prevention and control (appropriate controls, preventive maintenance, emergency preparation, medical program)
- Safety and health training (training topics geared toward the exposure and level of employee)

Ask internal safety hazard questions

There are many questions you should ask before an injury or illness occurs. This is not an exhaustive list but may get you started.

Has a thorough risk assessment of the workplace been completed?

Performing risk assessments are crucial to establishing a safe workplace and a benchmark in continuous safety improvement. In order to know what your organization needs to correct, improve or maintain, a risk assessment must be at the foundation as you evolve your organization's safety and health program existence.

Why are employees doing unsafe things?

If an employee is injured, the incident was probably caused by multiple factors.

What specific improvements are necessary to lessen or eliminate risk?

- Were unsafe actions influenced by production output goals?
- If the injury was caused by a shortcut, why was the shortcut taken?
- Had the employee been properly trained to perform this task?

### How can you prioritize and fix the safety problems identified?

Once identified, organizations need a systematic method to prioritize potential hazards and exposures. A good way is to use the A, B and C prioritization process:

- Class A: High risk, imminent danger. Immediate corrective action needed.
- Class B: Medium risk, potential danger. Corrective actions are completed within a reasonable time period.
- Class C: Low risk, advisory danger.

What do you need to change about your existing culture to integrate safety?

Here are a few possible scenarios that indicate a problem:

- Employees are rewarded for getting more done in a shorter amount of time. In a famous court case years ago, a jury found that a 30-minute pizza delivery guarantee creates an environment that encourages reckless driving.
- Employees are reprimanded if they fall behind, forcing them to rush.
- Cheap personal protective equipment (PPE) is provided but it is broken, scratched, or uncomfortable, deterring employees from wearing it.
- You assume an incident always is a result of human error (employee). Thorough causal analysis can reveal the true cause of an incident. If the same incident type occurs repeatedly, chances are it is a systematic issue and not an employee issue.
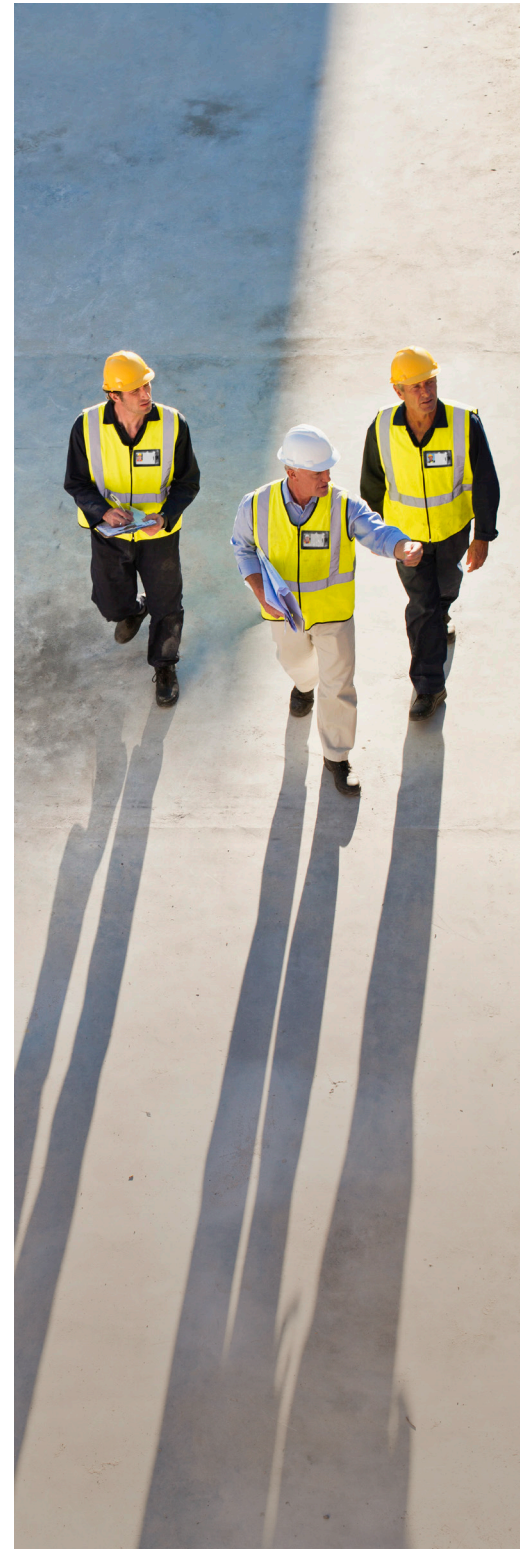
Build safety into the new business culture

Incorporating safety into your organization's culture can seem like a daunting task. Just like a complicated project at work, it helps to break down what you need to do.

Here are points you might consider covering:

Management buy-in and support

Management must not only lead in the development, implementation and monitoring of health and safety policies, programs and procedures, but they also must practice what they preach.

If they are to hold their employees accountable to adhere to established health and safety protocol, then they too must be accountable to their employees to follow the same norms they are enforcing.
Leadership sets the tone.

If employees hear from the C-suite that safety is the top priority, then they know that safety is of value to the organization.

If they do not practice what they preach – if they, for example, approve a request to override an existing safety rule to meet a production goal their safety line in the sand has been compromised and trust is lost.

Understanding and managing risk

If an organization cannot understand risk, they surely cannot identify risk. And if a risk cannot be identified, then the risk can certainly rear its head in the form of an employee injury or damage to equipment.

Raising employee awareness via workplace safety training, situational awareness instruction and a hand-on approach can dramatically improve risk awareness quickly. Building this higher level of safety awareness bolsters an organization's risk prioritization (corrective/ preventive actions) and which hierarchy of control will be employed to address that risk.
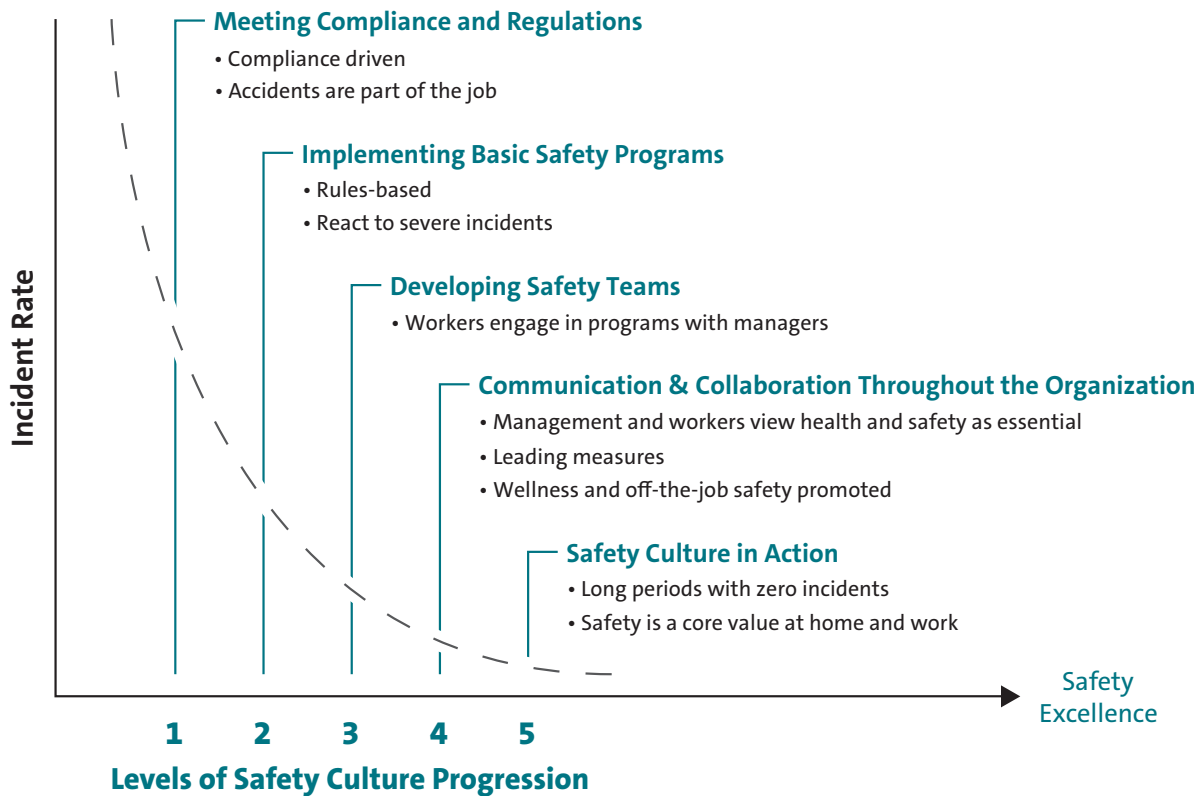
Maintain an evolving safety culture

Creating a strong safety culture is not a set and forget activity. You need to continually engage employees and empower them to share what they see in the workplace without repercussions. Safety programs should be reexamined on a regular cadence. Using tools like software to report and share KPIs with leadership can keep the conversation going. Here are other actions that you can take to maintain a safety culture:

- Continually complete and update risk assessments.
- Practice management of change (MOC). Supervisors across the organization must sign off on all changes made to procedures, equipment, chemicals and processes, and communicate the changes with employees after fully understanding the health and safety implications.
- Create plans and processes before executing anything that impacts the health and safety of your workplace.

Progressing to competency in workplace safety management

Meeting Compliance and Regulations
- Compliance driven
- Accidents are part of the job

Implementing Basic Safety Programs
- Rules-based
- React to severe incidents

Developing Safety Teams
- Workers engage in programs with managers

Communication & Collaboration Throughout the Organization
- Management and workers view health and safety as essential
- Leading measures
- Wellness and off-the-job safety promoted

Safety Culture in Action
- Long periods with zero incidents
- Safety is a core value at home and work

Incident Rate

Safety Excellence

1   2   3   4   5

Levels of Safety Culture Progression

Perform job hazard analysis

A job hazard analysis (JHA) is an effective way to improve safety performance by breaking a task down into component steps, identifying hazards and determining appropriate controls for each of identified hazard.

This data can easily be used to educate employees on safe practices prior to operating equipment.

Why do I need a JHA?

The purpose of the JHA is to identify potential risks that could injure or sicken an employee performing a certain task. It helps ensure that employees understand the tasks and hazards related to their job and allows the employer to mitigate those hazards.

Involving your employees will help minimize oversights, improve quality analysis and get workers to buy in to the solutions, because they will share ownership in their safety and health program.

Before starting your JHA, review the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards for your industry. Compliance with OSHA standards is mandatory for most industries so you must incorporate their requirements in your JHA to meet federal standards. OSHA standards, regulations and technical information are available online at **www.OSHA.gov**.

In addition, your state or municipality might have additional standards and regulations you must follow.

What type of jobs require a JHA?

The safety of any job can be improved using a job hazard analysis. Typically, certain conditions benefit most from this detailed review:

- Jobs with the highest injury and high illness rates
- Operations that include threat to life or career-ending injury/illness
- Situations where a single work-related error may result serious injury
- New job requirements or equipment implementation
- Work that is performed infrequently
- Jobs with complex requirements

Good hazard scenarios describe:

- Where it is happening (environment)
- Who or what it is happening to (exposure)
- What precipitates the hazard (trigger)
- The outcome that would occur should it happen (consequence)
- Any other contributing factors

Possible JHA questions to ask:

- What can go wrong in this job role and what are the resulting consequences?
- What factors might contribute to a potential hazard?
- How likely is it that the hazard will occur?
- What can be done to eliminate the hazard or reduce the risk to an acceptable level?
- What employee safety training methodology would be most useful to offset safety incidents?

Use safety incident investigation reports

One effective way to avoid repeat accidents is to understand how an event occurred and how to avoid that type of incident in the future. A good way to start is to fill out an investigation report as soon as possible. Reports can be developed for any of the following:

- **Accident:** Unplanned event or action that results in injury, illness, health, damage to the environment, property or materials.
- **Near miss:** Unplanned event that did not result in injury, illness or damage – but had the potential to do so.
- **Incident:** Includes events defined as an accident or near miss but may also include events such as business interruption, production losses or failures, outside events or people affect the business. This can be used for any type of upset condition or unplanned event.

This sample report form can help document the findings of a preliminary investigation into an accident or incident in your workplace.

JOB HAZARD ANALYSIS

Employee: Ted Jones

Date: 1/28/2014

Location: South Plant, Finished Goods

Job Description: Rotor pallet stacking

PPE: Safety glasses, gloves, hearing protection, shoes, long pants

Risk Matrix	Incident Severity			
Reoccurence	Negligible	Marginal	Critical	Catastrophic
Impossible	L	L	M	M
Unlikely	L	M	M	M
Not Expected	L	M	H	H
Expect	M	H	H	H
Probable	M	H	H	H

STEPS	POTENTIAL HAZARDS	CONTROLS	RISK PRE	RISK POST
Place slip sheet	1. Ergonomic stressors 　a. Back 　b. Hand/wrist (pinch grip) 2. Dropping slip sheet on feet 3. Sharp or rough edges on slip sheet could cut hands/legs	1. Ensure lift table is at waist level 2. Move feet to square up and avoid twisting during the lift 3. slide slip sheet close to body before lifting 4. Cut/slip-resistant nitrile-coated gloves 　a. Change gloves if oily 5. Long work pants	M	L
Pick and inspect rotor	1. Ergonomic stressors 　a. Hand/wrist (lifting/turning rotor) 2. Cuts/abrasions from sharp/rough edges 3. Exposure to metal oils/cutting fluid (skin irritation) 4. Dropping rotor onto fingers or feet	1. Reduce hand/wrist stress by resting rotor on table during inspection 　a. Use rotor lift assist if provided 2. Cut/slip-resistant nitrile-coated gloves 　a. Change gloves if oily or skin becomes irritated 3. Exposure to metal oils/cutting fluid (skin irritation) 4. Dropping rotor onto fingers or feet	M	L
Transfer: Move from picking location to drop-off location	1. Ergonomic stressors 　a. Back (reaching/twisting) 　b. Hand/wrist (pinch grip) 2. Slips/trips 3. Dropping rotor on feet 4. Striking leg/knee on lift table	1. Move feet to square up anfd avoid twisting during the lift 　a. Use rotor lift assist if provided 　b. Use two hands and keep rotor close to body if no assist available 2. Cut/slip-resistant nitrile-coated gloves 　a. Change gloves if oily or skin becomes irritated 3. Exposure to metal oils/cutting fluid (skin irritation) 4. Dropping rotor onto fingers or feet	M	L
Place: Sit and arrange rotor on slip sheet	1. Ergonomic stressors 　a. Back (reaching/twisting) 　b. Hand/wrist (pinch grip)	1. Limit reaching by approaching the lift table on the side nearest where rotor will be placed 2. Move feet to square up and avoid twisting when placing rotor	H	L

JOB HAZARD ANALYSIS

Employee: _____

Date: _____

Location: _____

Job Descrioption: _____

PPE: _____
_____

Risk Matrix		Incident Severity		
Reoccurence	Negligible	Marginal	Critical	Catastrophic
Impossible	L	L	M	M
Unlikely	L	M	M	M
Not Expected	L	M	H	H
Expect	M	H	H	H
Probable	M	H	H	H

STEPS	POTENTIAL HAZARDS	CONTROLS	RISK	
			PRE	POST

Accident investigation goals:

Accident investigations are a tool for uncovering hazards that were either missed earlier or require new controls (policies, procedures or personal protective equipment). Near miss reporting and investigation can identify and control safety or health hazards before they cause a more serious incident. Keep in mind, your investigation process should be driven as fact finding and not fault finding.

Reporting should include the following actions:

- Document facts
- Satisfy legal requirements
- Understand what happened
- Determine root causes
- Define corrective actions to prevent a reoccurrence
- Identify any training gaps
- Ask open-ended questions, listen carefully and be courteous.
- Interview everyone separately
- Ask all involved parties, including witnesses, to complete their own incident report
- Take photos and secure evidence immediately

Top-performing companies create a culture in which everyone feels responsible for identifying, reporting and reducing potential risks, improving a company's ability to take corrective action before an incident or accident occurs. From the shop floor to the C-suite, establishing a culture of safety involves a fundamental shift in thinking and behavior and organization wide commitment. It takes time to create and time to foster, but it is an investment well worth making because of the positive impact it can have on the health of any business and its workforce.

For more information, visit UL.com.

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