

Safety improvement process overview

Workplace Safety & Health | Program Development

Employee injuries affect us all. Employees suffer the pain and discomfort of the injury. They can also suffer financial loss when workers' compensation benefits do not completely replace their earnings. When employees are injured, the disruption can affect quality, production, costs and morale. These indirect injury costs can sometimes be four or more times the direct cost of the employee injury.

The Safety Improvement Process is a positive system for identifying and controlling workplace hazards, thereby,

- Reducing the frequency of employee injuries and
- Minimizing associated workers' compensation costs.

Studies done by the National Safety Council indicate that employee injuries can be reduced by addressing employee "at-risk" work practices. No employee wants to be injured, and your employees do not engage in at-risk work practices thinking that they will be hurt. But, because an employee can sometimes perform an at-risk work practice hundreds, even thousands, of times with no injury, they often develop an "it won't happen to me" attitude. Or, you may hear that "I've always done it this way, and I've never been hurt." Changing "at-risk" work practices to safe work practices requires five essential strategies:

1. **Hazard recognition and control** – The first essential strategy is problem identification and the development of controls to employee injuries. You should focus on the "vital few" tasks - those tasks in which an employee injury is most likely to occur. Address hazards in the "vital few" tasks using engineering or administrative controls to eliminate, minimize or isolate them.
2. **Pinpoint safe work practices** – Second, identify and communicate the safe work practices you expect employees to use on those tasks that have the highest potential for employee injuries. The Safety Improvement Process gives you a formal process to identify hazards and document safe procedures.
3. **Observation and feedback** – It's critical that you follow up on safe work practices – that you make periodic observations and give employees feedback based on those observations. Most tasks will be completed safely and this provides a good opportunity to recognize those employees who contribute to making it a safer place to work. It's also a good opportunity to coach employees who are working "at-risk."
4. **Process management** - It is essential that roles and responsibilities be defined for each person in this process. Senior managers, supervisors and employees all need to know what is expected of them and be held accountable to those expectations. There are two special process roles. The Process Champion is a member of management who keeps the process on track. The Process Coordinator coordinates the entire process.
5. **Performance measurement** - Process measurements will tell you if your safety performance is improving and whether everyone with process responsibilities is performing them as expected. Setting goals to increase the frequency of safe work practices will help you continuously improve your safety performance. Celebrations recognize all participants contributing to the success of your process.

The benefits of the safety improvement process are:

- Supervisors have a structured process to analyze and control both the physical hazard and work practices related to a specific task.
- Supervisors focus attention and time on those tasks that have the highest potential for employee injury reduction.

- Supervisors use rewarding feedback (or correcting feedback as necessary) to increase the frequency of safe work practices.
 - Employee injuries and the cost of those injuries will decrease as the frequency of safe work practices increases.
 - Employee involvement in safety is increased.
 - The frequency and quality of safety communications between management and employees increases.
- Commonly asked questions about the safety improvement process

How can we implement this program?

The Safety Improvement Process is based on these fundamental concepts:

- Studies suggest that a majority of accidents can be prevented by adherence to safe work practices.
- Focus your efforts on increasing the frequency of safe work practices. When you do this, the frequency of at-risk work practices and resulting employee injuries will decrease.
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How will this process help us reduce our employee injuries?

Working together, managers, supervisors and frontline employees will:

- Identify workplace hazards,
- Implement engineering controls or define safe work practices to protect employees from those hazards.
- Recognize those employees who engage in safe work practices to ensure the consistent and frequent use of those safe work practices.
- Coach those employees engaged in at-risk work practice.

What role do senior managers play?

- Be supportive of the program
- Demonstrate your commitment to employee injury reduction through your words and actions.
- Introduce each supervisor training session and attend at least one.
- Encourage participation in the program.
- Model safe work practices.
- Hold managers, supervisors and employees accountable to their responsibilities.

What is the role of the Process Champion?

The Process Champion is a member of management whose primary responsibility is to coordinate program activities and keep the project moving on schedule. This person should be able to manage complex projects.

What is the role of the Process Coordinator?

The Process Coordinator is the hub of the program. This individual will be responsible for coaching, tracking program performance and presenting management reports on program implementation and results. This should

be someone who is well organized, is a good coach, someone who others in the organization respect, someone who is comfortable training others and speaking in front of groups, and most important, has the time available to perform these duties on top of their other responsibilities.

What role do our supervisors play?

- Show care and concern for the safety of all employees.
- Pinpoint the safe work practices for selected tasks within their area of responsibility.
- Make formal observations of employee work practices.
- Give immediate feedback to employees observed.
- Make informal safety observations and give feedback as appropriate.

Why do we need to pinpoint safe work practices?

Observers need to use an objective list of safe work practices so that employees know that:

- The observation process is free from bias and personalities,
- The feedback employees receive is focused on injury reduction, and
- The data collected will be a useful guide in problem solving and action planning.

Do we have to evaluate every task we perform?

No. We are focused on reducing the frequency and severity of employee injuries. We will pinpoint the safe work practices for those “vital few” tasks that present the greatest risk of injury to employees

What is our “Return on Investment” in this process?

By reducing employee injuries we will be reducing our associated workers’ compensation loss costs. In addition we will:

- Improve productivity, by reducing lost time resulting from injuries, medical treatment, recovery time, paperwork and training temporary or replacement employees.
- Improve quality and customer service by keeping experienced employees safe.

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