



Introduction: What Is Workplace Safety?

Hundreds of books have been written on the broad field of safety and health management, and thousands more can be added when considering specific safety and health considerations and processes focused on given industries. Coupled with academic research, journal articles, and regulatory writings, the field of workplace safety has a considerable volume of work behind it. In large part, these materials have been published for the safety practitioner or those with some existing knowledge of workplace safety and some academic background or training. Such books, guides, articles, and research papers have created a bridge from the basics of safety and health, to program development and management, to more complex issues, such as specific hazard controls, toxicology, and the role human behavior plays in managing workplace safety, with toxicology and human behavior serving as general examples. In addition, many provide information and guidance toward regulatory compliance. All were written with the goal of reducing the potential for workers and an organization's other constituents, such as the general public, to become injured or ill. In most cases, these writings have focused on a specific readership; a few have been much broader in their scope, hoping to appeal to wide audiences. Very few

have recognized the distinction in the size of a business or, more specifically, the differences in available managerial and economic resources as well as the technical capabilities within a company or those assigned to manage workplace safety.

Clearly, then, the ability to manage workplace safety effectively hinges on several critical considerations, such as:

- Establishing a clear commitment to safety
- Identifying unsafe actions and conditions
- Providing resources for safety training (including advanced safety training for a supervisor)
- Assigning someone the task of safety or assuming it yourself, and providing the resources (time and money)

Who should read this book? Although many will benefit from a review of its contents, this book's major audiences are intended to be the executive of a small-to-midsized company tasked with workplace safety (among many other duties!), the human resources professional, the operations manager, or those vested with collateral safety and health management duties, along with individuals relatively new to the field of workplace safety management.

There are several ways to answer the opening question of this book, "What is workplace safety?" and its sister question, "Why is workplace safety important?" We'll begin with some thoughts on the challenges of managing such programs as a mechanism to begin addressing the query. Although seemingly easy, the answer focuses upon several critical considerations that are equally important; for example, it's just as critical to discuss the challenges of managing workplace safety programs as it is to highlight the objective steps that actually guide a workplace safety program to fruition. Both of these considerations are no more important than the development of the skills to identify hazards in the workplace or the ability to maintain effective workplace safety training programs. As you will see, workplace safety management is a complex set of activities, all focused on one outcome: reducing or eliminating injuries, illnesses, and incidents.

This chapter discusses additional considerations focused on managing programs, understanding the link between knowledge of operations and workplace safety, identifying hazards, and getting programs started. We also

outline some of the major challenges those responsible for workplace safety (you) will face on the journey to successful program development and deployment.

For many, the management of workplace safety programs has long been seen as a complicated issue. This perspective exists for many reasons. Such reasons are found in the confidence necessary to:

- Deploy a workplace safety program
- Truly understand the nature of the hazards your business and workers are exposed to
- Ensure that regulatory mandates are being met

Each is an essential goal within a workplace safety program, and separately they comprise critical aspects of the program. Taken together, they begin to set the stage for success; however, the safety practitioner is faced with many other challenges in developing an effective workplace safety program and ensuring its success. This chapter, as it answers the question “What is workplace safety management?” also addresses the management issues noted above and more importantly, why it is important to assure their success.

To a large extent, this book is designed to moderate those challenges by breaking workplace safety management into discrete, bite-size elements, both *tactical* and *strategic*. Additionally, this book is intended to assist the reader to capitalize on the efforts required to manage workplace safety programs while tasked with a myriad of other responsibilities. Workplace safety management must be given its proper place within an organization’s many initiatives, and this can be accomplished only by achieving both an understanding of need and the basic skills to build a program and control it effectively.

Workplace safety programs are only one among many for which time and other resources must be made available. These programs must receive the proper attention, but neither more or less than necessary. It is best, however, to blend workplace safety management programs with operations and other programs. In larger organizations, these programs may be managed by human resources, for example. However, in the small and midsized company, management most often falls to you.

By understanding the strategic and tactical aspects of workplace safety

management programs, and their related elements, you as “safety practitioner” can dedicate your time and that of others, and rally the necessary resources to ensure that a meaningful program is constructed. Without this understanding, something critical will be missing from the final product.

There is one very important distinction to point out now. This book is about the management of a workplace safety program. Our intention is to provide you with the insights necessary to structure and manage a program; we do not aim to teach you each and every intricacy of being a safety professional.

**WORKPLACE SAFETY MANAGEMENT
IS STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL**

As you move through the chapters in this book, a picture will be painted, if you will, with the broad strokes of the strategic and tactical aspects of workplace safety programs (see Exhibit 1.1). The detail will be painted as the book unfolds. These efforts include highlighting the attributes of workplace safety programs and the activities necessary to ensure their success.

The strategic aspects include the rationale for:

- Programs
- Management commitment and support
- Regulatory compliance
- Program development and deployment

**EXHIBIT 1.1 STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL ASPECTS OF
HEALTH AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT**

Strategic Aspects	Tactical Aspects
Rationale for programs	Hazard identification
Management commitment	Hazard control
Regulatory compliance	Links to other human resources programs
Program development and deployment	Incident investigations Training

As you might suspect, the strategic aspects of workplace safety management plans lay the foundation for planning efforts and are those intended to ensure that plans are not short-lived.

In addition, the picture will include the tactical elements of workplace safety management. These elements include:

- Hazard identification
- Hazard control
- Linkages to other management functions (i.e., disciplinary measures and access to employee assistance programs; see Exhibit 1.2)
- Investigation of incidents, such as injuries, illnesses, and near misses
- Employee health and safety training

Understanding the links to programs associated with workplace safety, or those that mutually benefit safety, are important for a number of very good reasons, including:

- If there are other programs that benefit from workplace safety activities and programs, management tends to lend a greater deal of support. This is the case for many reasons, including program-related economies of scale (i.e., through the development of one program, another benefits). Such is the case with workplace safety management and workers' compensation programs, for example.
- Cost control. As you might suspect, controlling injuries and illnesses also helps an organization control and even reduce its workers' compensation insurance costs.
- Greater degree of centralized management and program control.

EXHIBIT 1.2	RELATED HUMAN RESOURCES PROGRAM EXAMPLES
	<div>Employee assistance</div> <div>Benefits</div> <div>Discipline</div> <div>Americans with Disabilities Act</div> <div>Early return to work</div>

These are particularly important for the small and midsize company, where it is typical for members of the management team to wear more than one hat and have responsibility for more than one function.

More detail will be provided on both the strategic and tactical aspects of workplace safety management in other chapters.

The tactical aspects of safety and health programs are the “what” of programs, compared to the strategic aspects, which are the “why.” One cannot succeed without the other, and as you can see from Exhibit 1.2, many other human resources functions are related to workplace safety or are aided by workplace safety efforts.

So far we have been setting the stage for *what workplace safety is*. It should be fairly clear that such programs are not comprised entirely of just written words. If they were, then every company would borrow someone else’s and declare it is finished with the planning process. The authors, with nearly 50 combined years of experience, can tell you that is never the case.

WORKPLACE PROGRAMS: MANAGEMENT AT ITS BEST

Workplace safety management—and *management* is a key operative word in our overview—is the synthesis of three very important considerations:

- Consistent management effort

- Employee involvement

- Programming and the practice of the tactical aspects of workplace safety management

Consistent Management Effort

Even though many employers have tried, it is rare for a workplace safety program to succeed without consistent management effort (putting a plan together), involvement (leading by example), and dedicating the proper resources (time, materials, and money) to a program. There is a wide variation in what may be required from the resource allocation perspective among organizations. This is a function of size, the nature of the hazards employees are exposed to, regulatory requirements, and many other factors.

Employee Involvement

As we have uncovered during the development and analysis of literally hundreds of workplace safety programs, without the proverbial employee buy-in, few programs have any chance for success. This is the case for many reasons. Key among them is that employees feel a keen desire to be part of meaningful activities, and in fact, most often they have a considerable amount to contribute to the planning process. Who, for example, knows how to conduct operations better than your experienced employees? They may very well have recommendations or enhancements to safety procedures that can make great differences in reducing future hazards and employee exposure to injury or illness. Later chapters will cover this in more detail.

Practicing the Tactical Aspects

Workplace safety programs should be used as tools to improve operations and processes. This cannot happen if the tactical aspects of programs are not consistently utilized or practiced.

For example, organizations that enforce the tactical element of incident investigations are able to determine if an unsafe act or unsafe condition was the underlying cause of an injury or illness. With this information, employee training can be improved, or better focused, and operational improvements can be implemented.

The definition of *management* includes planning, leading, organizing, and controlling. There is no better way to frame the functional aspects of workplace safety management. Workplace safety management programs perform poorly when they are reactive in nature. As you will learn soon, to be reactive implies that the hazards associated with a job or tasks are allowed to exist before any preventive action is taken. The implication is that only outcomes (injuries and illnesses) are responded to. Thus, the reactive approach never attacks the root causes of these outcomes. Many employers respond only to that which has already happened and never look at what is causing an injury or illness to develop. Clearly, this approach is contraindicated if a management program that works is in existence.

A program that has plan-ahead features, such as hazard inspections and more detailed job hazard analyses, is capable of identifying physical,

chemical, biological, and ergonomic as well as psychological and operational hazards and of mitigating them prior to adverse outcomes. As you might suspect, the ability to identify and mitigate these hazards is the hallmark of better-than-average workplace safety plans.

Workplace safety management does include *planning*—planning for resources (whether people or materials) and all of the activities that go along with maintaining a management program. Once marshaled, these resources, particularly the organization’s human resources, require utilization. All human resources must be “playing from the same page and sheet of music” regarding workplace safety management. If this is not the case, then a discordant program effort will follow, with the result being injuries and illnesses.

The *leadership* associated with workplace safety programs actually can come from several sources. However, it is absolutely essential that a great deal of program leadership be vested with the individual or individuals who actually oversee the program and are held accountable for its results. To put it simply, those who are the consumers of the program—the employees—require a very clear picture of who’s in charge.

Because workplace safety programs require resources, they must be *organized* to obtain peak efficiencies. The first three management elements typically are linked to the strategic aspects of a workplace safety program. The tactical aspects traditionally are tied to the management element of *control*. This link is fairly simple, since the tactical aspects of workplace safety plans include training, incident investigations, hazard identification, and hazard control.

Workplace safety management requires program planning and resource availability. It also requires active leadership and organization to assure consistent deployment. In addition, workplace safety management requires controlling exposures to injury and illness. This criterion further delineates what workplace safety management is: those tactics that are implemented to reduce and, whenever possible, eliminate the factors that allow injuries and illnesses to develop. These factors are found in both unsafe acts and unsafe conditions.

Workplace safety management programs are not self-written or self-sustaining. As with many other programs, as they are integrated within the fabric of an organization and nurtured, it is much easier to maintain them and ensure that they are having a meaningful impact.

UNDERSTANDING TWO BASIC DEFINITIONS

Workplace safety management requires an understanding of two basic definitions. More specifically, it requires defining the *differences* in health and safety. Understanding health and safety—the words and what they mean—is essential to your success in managing such programs. We want to take a different approach with the definitions of health and safety. Sure, we could grab a dictionary and look up what it has to say about the two words. Those are textbook definitions. Although they are important and certainly help to establish a framework for our understanding of program needs, we want you to become familiar with the working world definitions. Familiarity will make all the difference when you begin to apply the tactical aspects of workplace safety management programs on a consistent basis.

HEALTH AND SAFETY = ILLNESSES AND INJURIES

First, we will review workplace safety from their individual attributes and central tendencies. We mention tendencies because what we are going to share *is not an absolute* but a very good guide and will make your management of programs easier and the focus of your planning efforts much more clear. It is absolutely essential to differentiate health and safety in your program efforts. Why?

The recognition of hazards and their control is directly related to the harm they may cause if a worker is exposed to a particular hazard. For example, if we are concerned about an employee's exposure to an organic vapor, it is essential not only to know what substance is in use, but how to measure for the presence of its vapors. It is equally important to be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of exposure or overexposure. Exposures to organic vapors generally result in illnesses, not injuries. For example, overexposure to the chemical degreaser 1,1,1 trichloroethane can result in nervous system (neuropathies) and visual (oculomotor) abnormalities and, with exposure or contact, may result in respiratory distress or dermatitis due to drying out the skin. Neuropathies and oculomotor disorders are *illnesses*, while respiratory distress generally is and dermatitis is an *injury*.

What’s more important is that the general tendency (again, not an absolute!) is for illnesses that develop to have done so from chronic exposures. Although some illnesses have rapid onsets, most occur over time—hours, days, or longer, but rarely immediate; again, this is referred to as chronic exposure.

The relationship is this (see Exhibit 1.3): Adverse health effects tend to occur over time (they are chronic) and tend to result in illnesses. Injuries, however, tend to be acute (i.e., they happen very suddenly).

The flip side to our health analogy is that injuries occur most often from employees’ exposure to conditions that result in a traumatic, quick event—an event that is acute. An example that we can all relate to is the amputation of a finger in a table saw or a worker with a foreign object in the eye as a result of grinding metal without proper personal protective equipment. In the first case, the loss of the finger is immediate, not something that develops over time. In the second case, the foreign object at the least will result in eye irritation and at the worst can result in the loss of vision.

The importance of distinguishing injury-producing situations from those that result in illnesses is rooted in both hazard identification and hazard control.

Many employers are guilty of attempting a unified methodology toward the resolution of injuries and illnesses. Unfortunately, no such single methodology exists, with perhaps the exception of total avoidance of hazards. Although no one would get hurt or become ill from this approach, there would also be no production; thus it is not a practical approach. One of the more common unified approaches to resolving injuries and illnesses, for example, is to recommend “more” training.

EXHIBIT 1.3 DIFFERENTIATING THE TENDENCIES IN INJURIES AND ILLNESSES

	Health or Safety Focus	Tendency Is to Be:
Injuries	Safety	Acute
Illnesses	Health	Chronic

Even though workplace safety training is essential, it is not the end all. In fact, we have used this quote in management seminars and speeches over the years:

You cannot train away the woes of the world.

What does this quote mean? Let's use a hypothetical scenario to make a point.

As a safety practitioner, you either know or have been advised that there have been several back injuries in the shipping and receiving department. You go to the department, meet with the supervisor, and ask a few questions about the injuries. You determine that some have occurred with newer employees while others among experienced staff. After the review, it is your recommendation that all shipping and receiving employees be provided additional lifting and material handling training.

Once the training has been provided, you begin keeping a closer eye on the development of injuries. You find that not only have they continued, but the frequency has actually increased! Puzzled? You shouldn't be.

As a *unified* approach to injury resolution, training has some distinct drawbacks, in spite of many benefits. Training does not change the size or the shape of the materials being lifted and moved. Training does not reduce the weight of the objects being lifted, nor does it modify the frequency of the lifts performed by the shipping and receiving employees. Training does nothing to alter the height of the shelving boxes are placed on or the length of the walk necessary once a box has been lifted. You see, even if you train an employee how to lift safely, there remain many task hazards that require mitigation to reduce the exposure to injury fundamentally.

Training is quick and generally cost-effective (with the exception, from a safety standpoint, of those areas where there is high employee turnover). Training *does not*, however, change the fundamental nature of a process, task, material, or machine to cause harm. Training is an adjunct to other sound safety activities. In the last example, training can supplement reducing the weight of boxes being lifted, how far they must be carried, and how often they are lifted. The underlying rationale is that to truly control injury- and illness-producing situations, appropriate physical (also referred to as *engineering controls*) and/or administrative controls must be implemented, not just along with training but also before training. Implementing

these controls requires that you understand if a hazard is going to (likely) result in an injury or illness.

The last sentence may seem self-evident. However, if the likelihood of injury or illness development and their distinction can be determined, then three things are possible:

Appropriate preinjury or illness physical controls and mitigation activities can be implemented.

Required personal protective equipment can be obtained and its use enforced, and other administrative controls can be implemented.

Training can be provided that supplements injury and illness control activities and teaches and further validates the importance of employees knowing how to utilize required safeguards and personal protective equipment and the appropriate steps to perform a task.

In many ways, it is easier to correct the factors that result in injuries and illnesses after they have manifested. If we can establish a cause-and-effect relationship, we should be able to resolve much of the hazard potential prior to employees becoming injured or ill. This approach is critical and one that should be repeated, almost like a mantra. Control or reduce the hazards, and you both lessen the reliance on training and manage the adverse outcomes (injuries and illnesses).

We want to highlight the fact that injuries and illnesses do not normally come from the same hazards (although some do, such as the physical injuries associated with repetitive tasks and the psychological stress related to such tasks). Thus, hazard-specific controls must be adopted. If you were unable, for instance, to determine if the injuries in the last example arose from physical hazards versus chemical hazards, then improper controls almost certainly would be initiated. At the very least, the potential for injuries would remain unchanged; in fact, it might actually worsen. Taking the time to distinguish the type of hazard that exists will better your mitigation strategies and ultimately reduce injuries and illnesses. We discuss these thoughts more in chapters that follow.

WORKPLACE SAFETY PROGRAMS: THEIR PURPOSE

Chapter 2 focuses on the elements of programs that must exist and some methodologies for assessing their existence and strength. However, it is

important to highlight here, albeit briefly, the overarching purposes of workplace safety programs.

It has been shown time and time again that safe companies are productive companies and almost always show a greater return on their monetary and personnel investments. Turnover is lower—that's another positive correlation. Further, companies that make every effort to enforce safe working protocols almost always find themselves in compliance with regulatory mandates, such as those associated with federal or state OSHA (Occupational Health and Safety Administration) regulations, and reduce the potential for citations and economic sanctions from these regulatory agencies.

From a big-picture perspective, there exist several general reasons to maintain workplace safety programs. These include but are by no means are limited to:

- Employee retention is frequently improved.
- Productivity is generally better than average.
- Regulatory compliance efforts are enhanced.
- Economic sanctions are potentially reduced.
- Hazards are mitigated, reducing injuries and illnesses.
- Related programs and the link to health and safety, such as those found in Exhibit 1.2, are improved.
- Process improvements are commonly identified.

For many of us who are responsible for safety and health programs on a regular basis, our purpose is fairly simple: Provide a long-term plan that is successful in protecting people from injury, illness, and death, in complying with regulations, and in controlling the associated financial costs with loss. Many organizations, however, require deeper understanding and validation. For those, the preceding list should be helpful. And, of course, we hope those who need additional urging will study this entire book.

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR WORKPLACE SAFETY PROGRAMS?

There's an old adage in the workplace safety arena that everyone is responsible for workplace safety, and that adage is true enough. We know, however, that not only does someone within an organization need to take on

the responsibility for the development, deployment, and maintenance of workplace safety programs, that person also needs to be held accountable for its performance. Do not let the issue of accountability frighten you from jumping right in and taking on the critical tasks associated with such plans. Our experience is that making an honest effort and focusing on the known injury- and illness-producing activities first will serve you in good stead. That is, you will be hedging your bets toward success.

Our review highlights the areas of responsibility that we have noted to be historically effective. To that end, it is helpful to consider the issue of responsibility like a system, if you will. Systems require the interaction of several components to operate effectively. Remove or damage one of the components, and the system either fails or works at something less than optimal capacity.

A “responsibility system,” then, is comprised of employees, supervision, management team members, and senior management, including those in ownership positions. Looking at responsibility as a system should provide many readers with some degree of comfort. Why?

Managing workplace safety programs does not have to be done alone or in a vacuum; reaching out and utilizing various personnel from your organization is an excellent tactic. For example, many employees, especially those with experience, do a fine job in identifying hazards. They have experienced the stresses of a particular job and may have seen coworkers injured doing many of the same tasks that they perform. Thus, although this is not universally true, employees are excellent additions to the safety team, serving as hazard identifiers. One practical example of this approach is the utilization of employees on inspection teams just prior to conducting a safety committee meeting.

Employees

Think of safety responsibility almost like a hierarchical organizational chart. At the base of this chart are employees; they have responsibility for complying with all workplace safety rules and regulations of your company. In addition, all employees should be vested with the responsibilities associated with hazard identification, especially those employees who occupy a spot on safety committees or other company committees related to workplace safety. This becomes increasingly important as the range of

control of any given supervisor or manager expands. More important, this responsibility actively engages employees in the workplace safety program. Many organizations choose to formally recognize employee contributions in this regard.

A timeless benefit of employee involvement and responsibility for safety-related functions as opposed to just outcomes (e.g., not getting injured) is that you are planting the seeds of safety in your supervisors-in-training or the next “safety director.” In addition, based on their skills and knowledge of safety procedures, some employees make sound additions to your training team. By selecting employees carefully, you can easily spread the footprint of safety throughout an organization.

Provide responsibility, with appropriate training and recognition, and employees will almost always reward you for your faith in their capabilities.

Supervisors

As you move up the hierarchy, supervisors need not only to comply with established company policy, they must lead by example. They also will have some responsibilities toward ensuring that their teams are following the same policies and assisting with training, and they are a critical asset in identifying hazards that lead to injuries and illnesses. More important, since supervisors are normally at the point of attack—that is, they are supervising personnel who are actually conducting the tasks within a company—they are often best suited to implementing day-to-day safety improvements. The controls supervisors are able to implement may be the most important safety responsibility they possess. Such controls might include retraining an employee, replacing a guard on a machine, or enforcing company policy and referring an employee for disciplinary action.

Many organizations hold supervisory personnel responsible for workplace safety activities and further reward or penalize them at performance review intervals. Such an approach is beneficial as it assists in perpetuating the activities that lead to safe working behaviors. Please note that we said “perpetuating the activities,” not recognizing “outcomes.” Rewarding outcomes (the frequency or severity of work-related injuries or illnesses) can have drawbacks (i.e., stimulating underreporting of injuries, near misses, or hazards in general), while recognizing the activities surrounding workplace safety has next to no drawbacks.

Management Team

The management team, generally a smaller subset of the organization and higher still on the hierarchical structure, has the responsibility of confirming that hazard mitigation activities have taken place and that supervisors are meeting their responsibilities. Further, it is usual for a member of the management team, if not specifically dedicated, to be known as or referred to as the safety manager. The responsibilities of a safety manager span both the strategic and the tactical elements of workplace safety reviewed earlier in this chapter. To a large extent, the responsibilities of members of the management team, especially the person occupying the predominant role, are outlined in Chapter 2.

Safety managers and other management team members obtain and assign safety-related resources, write plans, conduct or assist with training, review incidents, and implement agreed-on recommendations designed to reduce the exposure to the injury- or illness-producing acts or conditions.

Many people believe that management is where the “safety rubber meets the road.” Breakdowns at this level in regard to safety responsibilities almost universally result in a degradation of workplace safety programs and their performance.

Senior Management and Ownership

At the peak of the hierarchical structure is senior management and/or ownership. Just a few of senior management’s responsibilities are assigning management tasks, ensuring they are completed with a purpose that is focused on achieving safe working conditions and reducing injuries and illnesses, and serving as the biggest safety cheerleader in the organization.

You are ultimately responsible for workplace safety program deployment, approval of expenditures to ensure safety and safeguards are being deployed, and validating regulatory compliance. These all fall within the purview of senior management. Without support or through benign neglect, you can easily put the brakes on meaningful safety activities. The time for safety, the energy that is required, as well as the resources, all flow from the support, participation, and involvement of senior managers or owners.

To sum up this section: Everyone has a role and many responsibilities when it comes to workplace safety.

KEY CONCEPTS: THE TWO MOST CRITICAL ONES

It is imperative that you recognize that the events that lead to workplace injuries and illness emanate from only one of two situations: *unsafe acts* and *unsafe conditions*. If you can remember these two fundamental reasons why people are hurt or become ill at work, you will do a much better job of building your workplace safety program and, perhaps more important, determining the safety controls requiring implementation to manage exposure to unsafe acts or conditions.

To put it simply, by controlling, reducing, or eliminating unsafe acts and conditions, injuries and illness will be reduced as well. Most publications indicate that 80 percent or more of workplace injuries and illnesses are the result of unsafe acts. This statistic tends to indicate that someone—an employee or supervisor performing a task, for example—performs an unsafe act, such as using a saw without its guard, driving without seat belts, or typing for extended periods of time without taking breaks to reduce the potential for a repetitive motion injury. We understand that in the small and midsize company, you or those in a supervisory role may perform day-to-day tasks. Thus, it's important to understand that front-line employees are not the only ones responsible for unsafe actions; supervisors and management may be equally at fault.

Unsafe conditions (trip-and-fall hazards, chemicals left out in open containers, a vehicle with poor brakes, etc.) that are left unchecked comprise the remainder of workplace-related injuries and illnesses. For many reasons, regulations among them, today's working conditions are vastly improved over those of 5 to 10 years ago, and certainly over those of 15 to 20 years ago. Although conditions that result in injuries and illness still exist, and will continue to do so, tremendous improvements have been made.

We want you to remember the distinctions between unsafe acts and conditions. Correcting unsafe acts and conditions frequently requires different and often very specific approaches. The recommendations you make to reduce employee exposure to unsafe acts and conditions will be repaid several times over. In addition, by knowing the differences between unsafe acts and conditions, your recommendations for safety improvement will be much more specific and thus have a greater potential for success.

CHALLENGES FOR THOSE PRACTICING SAFETY

This text aims to assist you in facing a variety of challenges. The discussion that follows sets the tone for the remainder of the book and, perhaps, for additional and more advanced study on your part. Recognizing the challenges and preparing for them will also serve to better prepare you for tasks you face in workplace safety management activities within your organization.

As a safety practitioner, you will face many challenges. Our brief discussion is limited to the four challenges we think you need to prepare for most (and this book will help overcome) as you look at enhancing the health and safety of where you work.

Challenge 1: Understanding Operations

No one knows your business better than you. A common challenge exists when companies assign workplace safety responsibilities to those unfamiliar with your operations. To the extent that they do not know how your company manufactures its products, how items are transported, where raw materials come from and how they are processed, for example, workplace safety efforts will be hampered. How can a workplace safety program be effective if operations are not understood? Or, further, how can resolutions to workplace hazards be recommended?

If you assign someone the task of creating your workplace safety program, that person must get out among the staff and experience what they do for a living. They must hear the sounds; feel the heat, so to speak, and other sensations, such as vibrations; look at the equipment that is used; and get a clear picture of their duties. Armed with this information, this person will author a better program, conduct better training, and do a much better job of investigating injuries. These considerations are from both a strategic and tactical perspective (see Exhibit 1.1.)

Challenge 2: Understanding the Nature of Hazards

Although we spend considerably more time on this issue in Chapter 2, when we discuss hazard assessments, you need to be aware that one of your challenges rests with truly understanding the hazards that your employees are exposed to. Of course, this challenge is directly related to the first one:

If you understand operations, you will be able to determine *the actual, not general* hazards that are found within your operations. As you become more versed in the practice of workplace safety management, you will agree that overcoming this hazard is essential.

Challenge 3: Recognizing the Need for Specific Safeguards and Controls

If you understand your operations and the hazards that are present, then you can define a specific course of action to control the hazards and implement safeguards. More important, the safeguards you adopt will be related to the unsafe acts and unsafe conditions you have identified.

Understanding operations, the nature of the hazards that emanate from them, and the controls necessary to keep them in check is a powerful tool in your workplace safety arsenal. If you can consistently make the connection between these three challenges and overcome each, you will be well on your way to understanding and fending off Challenge 4.

Challenge 4: Putting a Workplace Safety Plan in Motion

Do not be lulled into inaction because you are new at workplace safety management or just getting started on your workplace safety program. Get the process rolling, obtain subject matter assistance from within the company, and go beyond talking about safety and start your program's tactical steps.

If need be, reach outside your organization to experts who may be available from your insurance broker or companies; many other sources exist as well. Oftentimes industry associations you belong to have resources you can call upon. As mentioned earlier, we caution against using someone else's plan; such plans rarely have any relationship to your operations and need significant editing. Borrowing a plan does nothing to assist in overcoming Challenges 1, 2, and 3. Roll your sleeves up and get at it.

The only way to ensure success when faced with Challenge 4 is to seek the appropriate approvals, where needed, put a team together, and establish meaningful time frames for completing the various elements of your plan. Write your own plan and conduct your own training; you will be glad you did. But do not wait. Start now and avoid the Churchill Paradox (discussed in the next section).

Note that the major challenges you face can be visualized as a cycle (see Exhibit 1.4).

Recognizing that one management activity precedes the other like a cycle is essential. Plans are not static. As new operations, machinery, and personnel are integrated and as new or revised regulations and the like become known, operations must be reassessed and plans modified. And it is very likely that, as the safety practitioner, you will have to go to the very first challenge and start again. So that you do not get shocked into inaction, it is important to note that, with practice, you will get better at managing these challenges.

Overcoming an Important Paradox

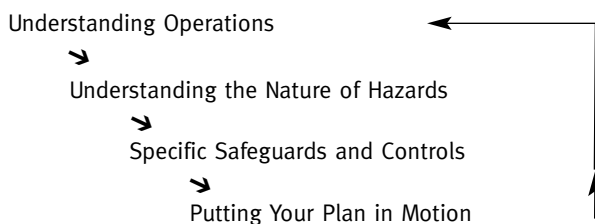
We end this first chapter with a philosophical thought that has proven meaningful to many people. To have any hope of developing a meaningful workplace safety program, you have to get at it. What do we mean by this? Let's use a story to make our point.

During the early stages of World War II and in spite of the urgings of Winston Churchill, the United States did not enter the war in Europe for quite some time. Churchill kept at it in 1939, 1940, and 1941, repeatedly asking the United States to get involved. However, having come through World War I not all that long before, our country was hesitant to enter another battle.

The United States engaged Germany in closed-door politicking, threatened military action and economic sanctions, and used diplomatic channels, all to no avail. Of course, once the United States did get involved in the European theater, the tide turned. Ultimately Hitler's forces were

EXHIBIT 1.4

SAFETY MANAGEMENT CYCLE



turned back, and England and Europe were saved. As the United States was beginning its involvement, Winston Churchill, of course, had something to say about the country's actions and inactions. He has been quoted as saying:

The Americans are a great people. You can always count on them to do the right thing . . . after they have tried everything else.

What's the relevance of this story to workplace safety management? Look at it this way: Churchill was imploring us to help very early in World War II, as he knew his country and most of Europe could not turn back the Nazi regime. They needed help from a growing superpower: the United States. It's likely we knew we were going to have to get involved but adopted an incremental approach instead. Of course, the Nazis marched on and millions died. Once we did engage, the threat to Europe was eventually controlled.

Much the same happens in the practice of workplace safety: We recognize a hazard or an adverse outcome, and instead of attacking it fully at the outset, we try several other steps first. Eventually we get it right, but while we are working toward getting it right, the hazards to employees continue, as do injuries and illnesses.

We call this approach to safety the Churchill Paradox. Overcoming the paradox and ensuring that the best workplace safety steps are implemented first will ultimately save you time, money, and the health of your workforce. Take the best actions first. Yes, sometimes you'll have to make an economic investment, but it will pay for itself many times over.

There is no doubt that you will face many challenges as you become more familiar with the management of workplace safety programs. The challenges are not insurmountable; in fact, you can consider them to represent an adventure that you will be glad you took. As you learn more about operations, you'll have an opportunity to interact with your organization's employees. While doing so, you'll develop credibility with them for your efforts. At the same time, you will become much more versed in the ways to control injuries and illnesses.

