Creating an Incentive Based Safety Program

You want to improve your organization's safety program; however, you feel like you have hit a plateau. No matter your efforts, you still see the same type of accidents show up. You send out safety alerts and conduct quarterly trainings for all employees. Management is actively involved. These are all great qualities of an effective safety program. Now our dilemma is creating interest and buy-in to reduce the accidents that effect the safety numbers year in and year out. This is where an incentive-based safety program can take us over the top.

Management Buy-in

Many believe any safety program begins and ends with the Safety Officer. However, it starts with management's support and views towards safety. If their view of safety is a hinderance then their support will not be the greatest. With that, the organization will most likely experience safety hurdles. What we want, rather need, is full support from management. With their support comes a commitment to utilize controls to mitigate identified hazards, the purchase of safety equipment, specialized training, etc. In addition, management's presence in safety trainings and the Safety Committee shows the commitment level.

What is an incentive?

When the phrase "safety incentives" is mentioned, what do many immediately think of? That's right, money. Most often a bonus is tied to reducing accidents or having no accidents at all which is a near impossible goal. However, money is not the only incentive that can be used for motivation. Here are some other examples of incentives:

- Recognition
  - o In a newsletter
  - o Marquee sign outside of entrance
- Paid day or half day off
- Prizes
  - o Apparel
  - o Speakers
  - o Coolers
- Breakfast or lunch with management
- Barbecue (or other) lunch for everyone

Avoid the pitfall of "No Lost Time Accidents"

Now that we have covered examples of incentives, we want to discuss some pitfalls. Tying any incentive to an unrealistic goal can have damaging effects. First and foremost, annual bonuses reliant upon no lost time accidents may cause injured employees to conceal their injury to preserve everyone's bonus. Conversely, if the goal is unattainable

(no accidents at all, for example), over time everyone will realize how unattainable it is and stop trying. In both examples, how strong is our safety program? It is not strong at all.

The key is promoting safety through all facets of the organization. Encouraging employees to report near misses and accidents is just part of the Safety Program. It is okay if an accident results in lost time. It is what happens during a major incident that tells you where your Safety Program is. Use major incidents as an opportunity to show all employees the risk exposure that was not identified in prior safety audits or missteps that lead to the accident.

Professional Development
Organizations want to retain and develop the best. This applies to safety, as well. Whether you already have a Safety Officer on staff or are working on succession planning, professional development will aid in ensuring you have or will fill the position with someone that aligns with the organization's vision. Providing individuals with opportunities to develop within their role will help the progress of improved safety. A few safety-related examples include but are not limited to:
- Texas A&M Extension Services (TEEX) topic specific safety classes
    - Confined space
    - Trenching
    - Lock out/Tag out
    - Many others
- TEEX Certified Safety and Health Officer
- Certified Safety Professional (CSP)
- Associate Safety Professional (ASP)
- OSHA 10 and OSHA 30
- Associates in Risk Management (ARM)

Be proactive not reactive
The best way to handle major impacts is to be prepared for some variation of the occurrence. If you anticipate that some major accident could occur, you can then prepare to either reduce the hazards or have a plan in place when the accident occurs. Additionally, recognize and reward employees for their safety efforts. When employees are recognized for safe work practices, it solidifies the employees' efforts to work safely. One of the hardest things to get any employee to do is report a near miss. The thing about near misses is they eventually result in accidents, sometime major. Employees are more likely to report any near misses when they work within a strong safety environment. Other potential recognition moments include submitting a new safety idea that is implemented, completing a major project with dangerous safety hazards and being a member of the Safety Committee. You want Safety Committee members on the committee to make a difference in safety, not because they were 'volun-told.'

Speaking of the Safety Committee, you want to have vertical representation of your company. This means you have field staff, office staff, first line management and upper

management involved. This gives a voice to multiple levels of the organization that could provide extra insight that other positions may not have known.

Another proactive moment involves Return to Work (RTW). This is one aspect of safety where you do not want to be reactive. The approach of creating a light duty task after a lost time accident is not the way. Accidents are going to happen and when they result in lost time, you want to be prepared. We can accomplish this by having conversations with supervisors that help identify opportunities for light duty tasks. The tasks should be meaningful and not used to degrade the individual. A list of tasks along with conversation with the injured employee's doctor will help bring back employees early and have them contribute. More information about RTW is detailed in another article, **Utilizing Return to Work to Control Claim Costs**, in this edition of Risk Advisor.

Safety Training
Another feature includes Safety Training. At times, training classes take on a feel of just going through the motions. "It's time for our annual re-training. Everyone pile into the training room so we can get this done." Sound familiar? Instead, shake things up. Create teams and have a competition based on the training where the winning team gets a special lunch, extended breaks for a week or some other non-monetary incentive. Give door prizes for correct answers, a company polo, hat, coffee mug, etc.

Creating an incentive-based Safety Program is strenuous but can have lasting effects if implement correctly. Recognizing and encouraging safe work and innovative safety ideas is an easy way to create buy-in from the employees. Focusing efforts on high frequency claim types, although reactive, can have a quick impact on the bottom line and can help with management buy-in. This can create a newfound enthusiasm for improved safety efforts. Changing the safety culture of the organization is critical to the long-term success of the Safety Program. No matter where your efforts start, involve everyone, and find ways to create excitement to work a little safer than we did yesterday.

The TWCARMF Loss Control staff would be happy to provide more information or assistance with your safety efforts.