



# Who's Accountable for Safety at your Organization

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**T**he most important thing you can do to improve safety performance and reduce accidents and injuries for your company is to improve safety accountability. None of the other safety efforts you engage in will have much effect if everyone in the organization is not involved in and held accountable for doing their part to make your workplace a safe one.

An effective safety program requires that you have policies and procedures in place, conduct safety training, identify and eliminate safety hazards and unsafe work practices, comply with provincial & federal regulations, motivate employees to work safely, and enforce your safety rules and safe work practices. But having all those policies and rules in place won't accomplish anything if someone (everyone) is not held responsible and accountable for getting them done!

## **Management Commitment.** **"Walk the Talk"**

Employees judge management's commitment to anything, safety included, not by what management

says but by what they do everyday. Having a safety mission statement, posting posters and safety slogans, incentive programs, and exhorting employees to "work safely" will accomplish nothing if employees perceive that management is not truly committed to safety.

One way to show that you really are committed to safety is to make people responsible for safety activities and then to hold them accountable for those activities just as you do for production and quality. Too often safety is seen as something separate from the "important" things like production, quality, and customer service because management doesn't hold people accountable.

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***Front-line managers and supervisors have the most effect on production, quality and safety within any organization. If top management does not hold them accountable for safety within their area of control, the safety efforts will fail.***

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Safety needs to be seen as a core

responsibility of the front-line management staff. Safety concerns and requirements should be a part of every management meeting right along with discussions of production and quality. If a manager or supervisor adequately performs their safety duties, such as conducting safety training, holding their safety meetings, consistently enforcing the safety rules and safe work practices, and motivating and rewarding employees for safe behavior, they should be rewarded (e.g., praised, rewarded monetarily, etc.). If they are not doing what is expected of them, they should know that they will pay the consequences.

Management must provide the time and money necessary for managers and supervisors to perform their safety responsibilities. Front-line supervisors are pulled in many directions and have many duties. If management doesn't allow them the time or resources to perform their safety responsibilities, it is unreasonable and unfair to then hold them accountable if they can't accomplish them.

## **Include safety accountability in every job description**

No one can be held accountable for

safety if it is not clearly considered a part of their job. Every employee should have clearly defined safety responsibilities and safe work practices that are considered to be part of their job. Whether that means wearing specific personal protective equipment, cleaning up a work area at regular intervals, using a mechanical lift instead of manually lifting something, etc., it is important that the employee know what is expected and that they will be held accountable. They should be praised for doing the right thing and coached, re-trained or disciplined if they do not.

It is critical that supervisors and managers be consistent in holding people accountable. It must be done DAILY, not at random times or once a year during a performance evaluation. Failure to hold someone accountable when you are aware they are not performing adequately or safely is the same thing as telling them that you don't consider it to be important.

### **Include Safety in Performance Evaluations**

Safety performance should be a part of every manager's, supervisor's and employee's performance evaluation. If it is not, employees will assume that it is not important and will concentrate their efforts on what they perceive management really wants.

Whether you do formal performance reviews annually or use a more informal approach to let your employees know what you think of their performance, the only way to get them to concentrate on what you want is to give them feedback of some sort on how they are doing and whether or not you are pleased with their performance. Just be sure that their safety performance is included in whatever feedback you give them, along with production, quality, customer service and other important performance areas. Reward good performance and give them an opportunity to improve if their performance is not up to your requirements.

### **Communication & Involvement – Key Elements**

People don't mind being held accountable if they have been involved in determining what they will be accountable for. They also have to feel that they have the ability, authority and resources to do what is required. It is important to involve the employees in identifying what is unsafe and what the expected safe behaviors, activities, rules, work practices, etc. will be. Get everyone's input if you expect everyone to buy into the required safety practices.

Everyone may not always agree with everything that is decided, but there is a better chance of compliance if they feel that they had an opportunity to voice their opinion and provide input into the decision.

Just as you must do with managers and supervisors, you must give the employees the time, resources and support to carry out their safety responsibilities. Otherwise, they will consider it unfair if you try to hold them accountable for things over

which they have little or no control.

To accomplish the various tasks that need to be done for your safety program to work and to reduce hazards and unsafe work practices, always assign specific tasks to individuals or teams. Make sure that they understand what needs to be done. Set specific dates for completion and follow-up to be sure that it has been done. Finally, hold the individual or team accountable for their action or inaction. Praise and reward for a job well done. Coach, show your displeasure or penalize them if they fail to act on the assignment.

Improving the accountability for the safety of everyone in your company is one of the best ways to improve your safety performance and reduce accidents. If everyone is aware of what their duties and responsibilities are, exactly what is expected of them, and that they will be held accountable for their actions or inaction, your safety program will be effective. Without accountability nothing will happen and you will not achieve a safe workplace. ♦

