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INVOLVING WORKERS IN CONSTRUCTION SAFETY

Employee Involvement, Behavior Safety and Safety Perception Surveys

Employee Involvement

Employee ownership of safety is a key feature of a culture of safety where injuries are extremely rare events, even reaching 1,000,000 and more OSHA Recordable free hours in a continuous string. However obtaining employee ownership is not an easy task, especially for those leaders who are accustomed to merely giving orders to obtain compliance to safety rules and procedures. Securing the critical employee ownership requires significant change in a leader's approach to safety culture development. The question is "How do I do that?"

The Construction Industry Institute research into why some contractors can achieve amazing numbers of injury free hours has answered that question:

Behavior Safety

The Du Pont STOP (Safety Training Observation Program) process was one of the first initiatives in this area. It is a Supervisor-led program but in recent times has been extended into the hourly ranks by some companies. The essence of the program is observations of crafts at work with the objective being to detect any "at-risk" behavior. The observer then counsels the observed individual suggesting improvements in his/her work process. The anonymous observation data is then compiled into a data base. The resulting percentages of Safe Work and "At-risk" observations are periodically reported back to the crafts. The "At-risk" data is analyzed determining any safety training needs that might be indicated. Many other programs are also available from a host of providers. An internet search will find the details. Typing "Behavior Based Safety" in a Google search will reveal literally hundreds of places where assistance is available. However the one key ingredient that one should never leave out is to "engage the crafts in a meaningful creative process" that allows the construction employees to make contributions to the design of the observation process you choose to use. This allows craft "ownership," and when you achieve craft ownership you have a very powerful engine to assist in driving your projects to a zero injury outcome.

Safety Committees that include hourly workers.

Safety Committees have been around for a long time; so long in fact that to some people they are interventions from the past. However, Safety Committees have proven to be extremely powerful ways of allowing craft personnel direct access to project leadership on safety matters. The most effective Safety Committees are those that are chaired by a top project executive, thus are not delegated to "only" the safety function to oversee and thereby promote craft ownership. The watchwords are to be "innovative and creative." The problem seen on union jobs has been the tendency to staff this committee with Union Stewards. While it is productive to engage the Union Stewards in safety dialogue, it is even better to also have a Safety Committee of a cross section of selected Trades personnel that are not Union Stewards. Early meetings with the Union Business Agents prior to project start to clear the way for installing a zero injury culture is essential.

In open shop situations the staffing of the Safety Committee should strive to select craft personnel who are natural leaders in the field work and who are also gifted with communication skills. The committee should meet regularly and be led by a line manager or superintendent with the safety function.

Safety Perception Surveys

One of the top craft involvement processes is to conduct “all employee” safety “perception” surveys. The survey should be focused on the quality of the zero injury safety technique implementation. Few owners require contractors do this, and even fewer contractors do this on their own initiative, even though the CII research found it to be one of the top 24 items found in a zero injury culture of safety. Obviously it will be best to have the survey conducted by someone outside the project leadership. Safety Perception Surveys should be conducted some time after the job start up and after craft staffing is onsite. Designing the questionnaire is critical: First create a list of about 15 questions to ask. These questions should specifically address the zero injury culture elements you are trying to install. Design a quality rating scale of numbers, with word descriptors for each number defining what a rating with that specific number would mean. This has a standardizing effect on the outcome. The questionnaire can ask employees to indicate job type or position such as Craft. And within Crafts “time on the project” can also be useful in analyzing the survey data. Other personnel including Foremen and other supervisory personnel should also be included. All input is to be on an anonymous basis.

For instance, a survey question might be “Rate your experience with Pre-task Safety Planning:” A 1-5 quality rating scale might have descriptors as follows. 1 = Not understood and not used; 2 = Some effectiveness present, but often task understanding is weak; 3 = Used effectively most of the time; 4 = Well done, generally understood, and most crew members participate; 5 = Used effectively, with all crew participating. After the survey is conducted the data are tabulated and analyzed focusing on finding opportunity for improvement. Where an all-employee rating below 4.0 on the above posed question occurs, immediate refresher training in Pre-task Safety Planning would be indicated as a remedy.

Once the Safety Perception Survey is completed Craft feedback is mandatory. The survey can be taken in a few minutes during a 20 minute job safety stand-down. Insure “all” project personnel are invited to participate. After the data are analyzed any remedial immediate action can begin immediately, and as soon as possible a second project safety stand-down is held to give all employees feedback on the survey results -- and just as importantly, what corrective actions are being taken by project leadership on the techniques that are determined to be in need of quality improvement.

Survey Truism

When Project Leaders conduct and take corrective action on employee Safety Perception Survey results, it proves to the hourly workers that “the safety talk is being converted into safety walk!”

NAC Safety White Papers

Through the Position Papers on Safety, the National Academy of Construction has summarized for corporate executives the practices being successfully applied by others, and is recommending that American businesses inside and outside construction investigate and use the safety research of CII. Many users of CII safety research have achieved consecutive work-hours exceeding one million without an OSHA/BLS Recordable injury.

The nine research-based CII Zero Injury safety leadership categories are:

1. Demonstrated Management Safety Commitment;
2. Staffing for Safety;
3. Safe Work Planning, Pre-Project and Pre-Task;
4. Safety Education, Orientation and Specialized Training;
5. Employee Involvement, Behavior Safety and Safety Perception Surveys;
6. Evaluation and Recognition of Safety Performance;
7. Contractor Selection and Management;
8. Accident/Incident Investigation Including Near Misses;
9. Drug and Alcohol Testing.

Please see web site www.naocon.org for a complete set of the previous 15 NAC Safety White Papers.

The ROI of Zero Injury Safety Performance

It is often heard from employers that the cost of implementation of the nine Construction Industry Institute zero injury safety initiatives is expensive. This is true! There is significant cost to the employer to apply the zero injury research. However this investment has a proven rate of return of 400% to 500% per annum when compared to the costs of BLS average injury rate performance for the construction industry in America. When implemented properly the Zero Injury Safety Leadership concept results in injury becoming a very rare event thus protecting your workforce from harm.

More Information?

Information and details on the increasingly popular “Zero Injury Safety Leadership Concept” are available from the following source: Construction Industry Institute, 3925 W. Braker Lane (R4500), Austin, TX 78759-5316 Ph (512) 232-3004.

www.construction-institute.org

See the NAC website at www.naocon.org for copies of the Safety Whitepaper series.

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