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S A F E T Y

Line Leaders Accountability for Safety

Since the advent of safety professionals in the construction industry there have been accountability issues (some recognized and some not recognized) with the question of “Who is in charge of safety?”

The research of the Construction Industry Institute, Austin, Texas has shown that safety excellence includes a top corporate executive charged with the oversight of safety administration; often along with employee health issues, plus some also add to the job role oversight of environmental issues. This paper will only address the safety portion of that role and address it in terms of safety accountability, with the focus on safety accountability extending throughout the organization. All too often employees will simplify the roles of the safety professionals viewing them as all encompassing. All encompassing, to the point that if an issue arises bearing on the subject of safety, then the view of all is, it belongs to the Safety Organization. All encompassing, to the point that if there is an injury the conclusion is; it must be the fault of the safety department.

When this scenario becomes a reality in an organization it is because organizational roles have not been defined or if defined, not defined in accord with the CII research. The CII research spells out the essential fact that when the objective is the elimination of all injuries the resolution of safety related issues should have voice that reports directly to the CEO. Yet the same research also points out that line management must be both responsible and held accountable for the safe execution of all work. These findings when implemented create an organizational “cross-pull.” The Safety Department is “pulling in” responsibility so they can be properly accountable for corporate administration of safety while at the same time the line leaders are told to “pull in” safety responsibility and be accountable for safe work execution. It is easy to see the potential for conflict is such a scenario.

(See NAC SWP 25A at www.naocon.org for an inserted typical Case Study Scenario.)

How does an organization solve this problem? The answer is by simply defining job roles. Defining job roles in the area of employee safety is not an easy thing to do because of tradition. The CII research on how some employers have left tradition behind to create safety cultures where recordable injury is rare to non-existent creates an opportunity to change this tradition.

The zero injury outcome cultures have revealed the proper approach to “Who is in charge of safety?” Simply put, the safety function is to be in charge of safety administration while the line management leaders are to be in charge of safety execution. Taking the time to define the roles accordingly, including role definition to where the crafts also have specific knowledge of their job safety roles, is essential for a smoothly operating zero injury safety culture.

Another need is to always maintain “line accountability” for safety incident reporting with line managers and supervisors. The rule is they “must always” make a report, up the line; even to the point of reporting of near misses. In a zero injury culture the Construction Industry Institute research shows that where zero injury exists safe work execution is led and managed by the foremen, superintendents and line managers ending at the top of the organizational supervisory ladder. In the case of a serious injury the Safety Professional’s (CSP) assistance is properly focused on the care of the injured, the investigation of the incident, matters of safety regulatory

compliance, safety standards of practice, safety education, training, coaching, and safety mentoring, along with inspecting and auditing. The CSP is accountable for safety support; line leaders are accountable to supervise an injury free outcome.

Having said the above it must also be clear to all that the able members of the safety profession are critical to implementation of the zero injury best practices that allows the elimination of workplace injury for extended numbers of hours worked. Records of a million hours or more without an OSHA Recordable are now commonplace.

In many ways and many places the safety professionals are the movers and shakers that keep line management's "safety nose" to the grindstone. The safety professionals urge, coach, chastise, plead, beg, reason, inspect, audit, challenge, train, educate, teach; yet as we willingly load all this on their able backs we fail to "properly" engage, thus utilize their hard gotten expertise. We sometimes over-engage them by delegating to them important roles of line management in safety accountability

Bottom line: Ensure line leaders are responsible to execute all work free of an incident. Should an incident occur in a zero injury culture they hold primary accountability to report these events of failure to the top leader echelons of the company. Through such reporting "responsibility," the line manager "feels" the proper amount of "accountability" for supervising an incident free workplace.

A line manager expected to conduct work injury/incident free, least of all things, will want to be calling the top company leaders to inform them of her/his failure. Such a failure aversion model assures line leaders use all due diligence to apply the full complement of CII zero injury research technology to ensure the elimination of unwanted safety incidences; so the dreaded calls to report failure to the top leader are avoided.

Emmitt J. Nelson, ME, PE, NAC, ZIC
Chair NAC, Safety Committee

NAC Safety White Papers

Through its Position White Papers on Safety, the National Academy of Construction is recommending that American businesses investigate the research of the Construction Industry Institute (CII) into how increasing numbers of employers are able to achieve a million work hours and more without an OSHA 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.

The ROI of Zero Injury Safety Performance

The Construction Industry Institute research has proved that the cost of successfully implementing the nine CII zero injury categories is returned at a rate of 400 to 500% per annum when compared to the costs of OSHA/BLS injury rate average performance (4.70 TRIR in 2010) for the entire construction industry in the United States of America.

Information and details on the increasingly popular "Zero Injury Safety Leadership Concept" is available from the following: 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 NAC Safety Whitepaper series.

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