Million-Dollar Question: How to Get Employees to Follow Safety Rules?

One of the most frustrating issues for employers when discussing workers' compensation and workplace safety is the challenge of how to get employees to follow established safety rules. A common refrain heard from employers is "I can have the best safety program in the world, but if employees don't follow the rules, then what good is it?" The million-dollar question is how to get employees to stop making risky decisions that lead to on-the-job injuries and higher workers' compensation premium expenses.

The challenge for employers is to raise the awareness among employees of the importance of safety and gain their buy-in for the company's safety initiatives. As with most things in life, everything starts at the top. The message sent by business owners and management to employees sets the tone for the value placed on safety within the business.

However, safety cannot simply be a top-down, management-driven process. While business owners and management are doing their part to establish safety as a business priority, efforts need to be made to include employees in the process and generate grassroots involvement to make your operations safer.

In terms of demonstrating management commitment to workplace safety, ways to do this start with developing a company safety policy and extend to making safety a regular topic at employee or management meetings. However, these words will ring hollow if they are not followed up with action.

Ways to "walk the walk" include providing resources (financial or otherwise) to implement safety initiatives, empowering employees to identify areas of need, suggest ideas for improvements, make decisions and supporting their decisions. Last but not least, it is critical to follow through on promises made to employees or at the very least explain why certain corrective actions cannot be taken.

Ideas for engaging employees include creating project-specific teams or focus groups that have a specific goal (e.g. creating an emergency evacuation plan or developing a safety recognition program) and timeframes. These "Involvement Teams" could be involved with internal inspections and self-audits, among other projects.

Perhaps the most effective way to engage employees is through a formal safety committee. The purpose of a safety committee is to identify, evaluate and address safety issues (employee comments, complaints, safety inspection results, safety goals/metrics, employee injuries, etc.). Safety committee meetings should include representatives from every area of the company and meet on a regular, continuous basis. Candid, open discussion between employees and management on a wide range of topics should be encouraged at safety committee meetings. A critical element is to value the input of all safety committee members, act on suggestions and follow through on promises.

Safety recognition initiatives are also a good way to jump-start a company's safety program and can go a long way toward raising awareness among employees and encouraging safe behavior. Safety recognition awards range from gift cards, gas cards and movie passes to paid time off.

If done right, any of these strategies generate an enormous amount of learning about the exposures in your business, foster better communication between employees and management, and create a greater likelihood

that employees will follow safety procedures…all things that over the long-run can lead to reduced workers' compensation expenses.

For more information on how to motivate employees to work safely, please call Shawn Combs, Group Safety Account Executive at (877) 360-3608, ext. 2364.