The value of visible, active senior management leadership in safety

Ask most employees what a corporate culture is and they'll say something like, "it's the way things are around here." Effective safety cultures typically provide the necessary support for employees to strive beyond minimal efforts, while other approaches to safety leadership fail to inspire the necessary safe work performance and attitudes in employees.

John Gardner described leadership as "the process of persuasion or example by which an individual or team induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers." When effective safety leadership is present, employees not only feel responsible for their own safety, they feel responsible for their peers' safety, and the employer supports them acting on that responsibility. Employees have the necessary tools and methods, as well as a feeling of personal empowerment to make an impact on how work is performed.

Here are some practical ideas for establishing an effective safety culture through visible, active senior management leadership:

- Lead by example and hold management accountable to the same standards as employees through measurable goals.

- Establish a budget to ensure that the necessary resources are available for safety training, establishing safety policies and procedures, conducting facility inspections, purchasing safety equipment, rewarding safe work performance, etc.

- Create an open door policy, and encourage employees to bring safety-related ideas and concerns to upper management. Follow up with employees on all items in a timely fashion, even those the company has chosen not to address.

- Conduct a safety perception survey, conduct personal interviews concerning company safety or conduct behavior observations of the workforce to establish a baseline for where the company culture currently stands.

- Encourage and reward employees for participation in company safety processes, such as safety committees, focus groups, wellness teams, accident investigation teams, compliance or housekeeping inspections, developing and conducting safety training, obtaining specialized safety training, developing recognition programs, developing written safety compliance programs, developing job-specific safe work practices, reviewing injury data for trends, or even assistance with abating and correcting hazards.