

SAFETY BRIEF: WRITTEN SAFETY PROGRAMS—WHY THEY MATTER!

The purpose of any written safety program is to minimize workplace hazards and exposures so employees can work safely and efficiently. The goal? Zero workplace injuries! Research shows that over 99% of all accidents are preventable. Hazards are the reason people get hurt, without the hazard- there is no injury. A hazard-free workplace is created by actively identifying and evaluating the risks, and applying controls to physically protect employees.

So, what is a health and safety plan?

Examples of written safety programs include, but not are limited to; confined spaces, hazard communication, fall protection, lockout/tagout, hearing loss prevention, respirator protection, and emergency response plans. Per the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the main goal of safety and health programs is to prevent workplace injuries, illnesses, and deaths, as well as the suffering and financial hardship these events can cause for workers, their families, and employers.

Who is responsible for creating health and safety plans?

It is the employer's responsibility to provide a safe workplace by preventing injuries and illnesses to employees. The employer should establish written safety programs to ensure the following:

- Workplaces are free of serious recognized hazards
- Employees have and use safe tools and equipment
- Employees are aware of potential hazards
- Safety training is provided
- Safety meetings are conducted regularly
- Workplace injuries and illnesses are recorded, including near-misses

The benefits of an effective health and safety program are invaluable to any organization. Accidents are more expensive than most people realize because of the hidden costs. Some costs are obvious, like workers' compensation claims that cover medical costs and indemnify payments for an injured or ill worker. These are the direct costs of accidents. But what about the costs to train and compensate a replacement worker, repair damaged property, investigate the accident and implement corrective action, and maintain insurance coverage? Not to mention the costs related to schedule delays, added administrative time, lower employee morale which can lead to increased absenteeism, and poorer customer relations. These are the indirect costs of accidents. Think of it as an iceberg, with the direct costs as the tip of the iceberg- only 10% of what we see; and the rest of the hidden iceberg representing the indirect costs at 90%. Indirect costs have been estimated to be at least 2.7 times more than direct costs!



Major Elements

The most effective safety and health program involve every level of the organization instilling a safety culture that reduces accidents for workers and improves the bottom line for managers. This includes the following four elements;

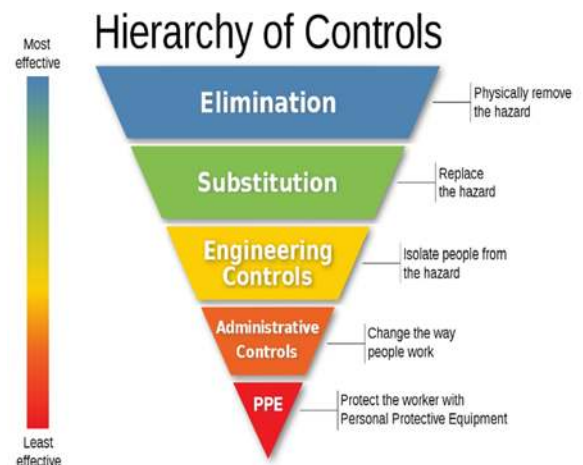
- Management Commitment & Employee Involvement
- Worksite Analysis
- Hazard Prevention & Control
- Safety & Health Training

Management commitment provides motivation and resources, and sets policies and goals. This means establishing and communicating clear goals and objectives for the safety and health program, and involves top management to assist in implementing the program. Employee involvement allows workers to develop and express commitment to safety and health. As employees must commit to safety and health protection for themselves and fellow workers- so must management be committed to safety and health protection. Management leadership and employee involvement are tied together, and complement one another, because one is not effective without the other.

Worksite analysis, or referred to as Job Hazard Analysis (JHA). This involves studying and recording each step of the job, identifying existing or potential job hazards, and determining the best way to perform the job to reduce or eliminate hazards. Jobs that were initially designed to be safe may change over time- and that may create new hazards or unsafe operations. It is up to management to provide the resources and grant authority so all personnel can find the hazards in the workplace and, once found, eliminate or control those hazards. So we are looking at finding existing hazards, and thinking about conditions or operations where changes might occur that creates future hazards.

Management must actively analyze the work and the worksite to anticipate and prevent harmful occurrences from happening. We want to capture the hazard before it occurs to prevent the accident/incident from occurring. Having school inspection checklists is a great way to conduct a worksite (school site) analysis. These checklists can include checking for fire or electrical hazards, exit ways, clean and clear walking surfaces, etc.. At the AMLJIA, we encourage our members to inspect their facilities in the spring and fall- checking for things like adequate lighting, fire or electrical hazards, clear walking surfaces, or stairs with railings.

Hazard prevention and control begins by determining that a hazard or the potential of a hazard exists. Where it's feasible, prevent hazards with effective designs of the job and the job site- these are called engineering controls. If the hazard cannot be eliminated, use other hazard controls, such as administrative or personal protective equipment. Examples of administrative controls may be a rotation of workers, or added work breaks. Personal Protective Equipment or PPE, is another method used to control existing hazards when they cannot be completely eliminated. PPE is the last level of control. It's important to eliminate or control the hazards in a timely





manner- if we allow too much time before the hazard is addressed or corrected, it could create a bigger problem. The best strategy to control the hazard is at its source. Lastly, safe work practices are conducted through training.

Training is the backbone of this system. In order for management to lead, for all personnel to analyze and be aware of workplace hazards, and to eliminate or control hazards- everyone must be trained. The scope of training depends on the size and complexity of the worksite and hazards involved.

- **When should training be conducted? And how often for training?** Safety training should always be conducted before an employee begins a new job or task, or when there is a new work process or new piece of equipment introduced, or when a new chemical is being used. Training should also occur after a workplace accident or a “near miss.” Refresher trainings should be provided on a routine basis as well. Refresher trainings are always good to keep employees from being stagnant or complacent in their jobs. Often we hear “well, this is the way it always has been, and nothing bad ever happened” And that’s when something does happen.
- **Who needs training?** New hires, seasonal hires, employees who wear PPE and work in high risk areas; maintenance, custodians, admin or people who directly with the public. Managers and supervisors should also be included in the training program, this emphasizes their roles in visibly supporting the safety and health program and also sets a good example. Practice what you preach.

These four elements that make up safety and health management programs are cyclical. Each of these elements should be reviewed at least annually to evaluate and identify deficiencies, and revise or make changes as needed. Safety and health training is continually changes to adapt to new circumstances, and ways of living.

Does your workplace have one or more of the following?

- Confined spaces
- Hazard Communication (HAZCOM)
- Fall protection
- Lockout/tagout
- Hearing loss prevention
- Respirator protection
- Emergency response
- Bloodborne Pathogens
- Driving; Safe Practices

Additional training is available through the AMLJIA Online University at www.amljia.org. Log on to the Online University for courses related on this topic such as “Hazard Communication,” “Safety Data Sheets,” and “Safety Awareness Program for Supervisors.” For more information about the Online University, contact the AMLJIA at 800-337-3682.