

Voluntary Safety and Health Program Management Guidelines

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has issued voluntary program management guidelines to encourage employers to do more than just comply with regulations to prevent occupational injuries and illnesses.

Although compliance with the law, including specific OSHA standards, is an important objective, an effective program looks beyond specific requirements of law to address all hazards. It seeks to prevent injuries and illnesses, whether or not compliance is at issue.

The language in these guidelines is general so that it may be broadly applied in general industry, shipyards, marine terminals, and longshoring activities regardless of the size, nature, or complexity of operations. Construction activities are not covered by this guideline because they are already covered under OSHA's construction standards.

The guidelines, a distillation of successfully applied safety and health management practices, are advocated by safety and health professionals and consultants representing corporations, professional associations, and labor unions.

The Guidelines

The guidelines call for systematic identification, evaluation, and prevention or control of general workplace hazards, specific job hazards, and potential hazards which may arise from foreseeable conditions.

The extent to which a program is described in writing is less important than how effective it is in practice. As the size of a worksite or the complexity of a hazardous operation increases, however, the need for written guidance increases to ensure clear communication of policies and priorities and consistent and fair application of rules.

Major elements of an effective occupational safety and health program include:

Management Commitment and Employee Involvement.

This calls for:

- A worksite policy on safe and healthful work and working conditions clearly stated so that all personnel with responsibility at the site and personnel at other locations with responsibility for the site understand the priority of safety and health protection in relation to other organizational values.
- A clear goal for the safety and health program and objectives for meeting that goal so that all members of the organization understand the results desired and the measures planned for achieving them.
- Top management involvement in implementing the program so that all will understand that management's commitment is serious.
- Employee involvement in the structure and operation of the program and in decisions that affect their safety and health, to make full use of their insight and energy.
- Assignment of responsibilities for all aspects of the program, so that managers, supervisors, and employees in all parts of the organization know what performance is expected of them.
- Provision of adequate authority and resources to responsible parties, so that assigned responsibilities can be met.
- Holding managers, supervisors, and employees accountable for meeting their responsibilities, so that essential tasks will be performed.
- Annual reviews of program operations to evaluate their success in meeting the goal and objectives, so that deficiencies can be identified and the program and/or the objectives can be revised when the goal and objectives are not met.

Worksite Analysis.

This includes:

- Identification of all hazards by conducting baseline worksite surveys for safety and health and periodic comprehensive update surveys. Also included would be an analysis of planned and new facilities, processes, materials, and equipment; and another of routine job hazards.
- Regular site safety and health inspections, so that new or previously missed hazards and failures in hazard controls are identified.
- A reliable system to encourage employees, without fear of reprisal, to notify management personnel about conditions that appear hazardous and to receive timely and appropriate responses.
- Investigation of accidents and "near miss" incidents, so that their causes and means for prevention are identified.

- Analysis of injury and illness trends over extended periods so that patterns with common causes can be identified and prevented.

Hazard Prevention and Control.

This calls for:

- Procedures that ensure that all current and potential hazards are corrected in a timely manner through engineering techniques where appropriate, safe work practices understood and followed by all parties; provision of personal protective equipment; and administrative controls, such as reducing the duration of exposure.

Safety and Health Training.

This includes training to:

- Ensure that all employees understand the hazards to which they may be exposed and how to prevent harm to themselves and other.
- Ensure that supervisors and managers understand their responsibilities and the reasons for them so they can carry out their responsibilities effectively.