

Employee Training – Foundation of Workplace Safety Programs

Occupational health and safety consultants often talk about the importance of senior management leadership and creating formal safety policies and procedures. However, once those tools are in place, it is critical that your company's employees are educated on your safety philosophy and trained on the appropriate procedures to take to prevent workplace accidents.

Employee training is the foundation of any effective safety and health program because it is the vehicle to provide information and develop skills needed by employees to maintain a safe working environment. Perhaps the best training opportunity is at the point of hire. While reviewing other company policies, new-hire orientation should also include a review of the following items:

- Company's safety and health policy;
- Roles and responsibilities of employee and employer;
- Procedures to report workplace injuries and illnesses;
- Actions to take in case of an emergency;
- Return-to-work procedures; and
- OSHA requirements.

Supplemental training conducted at least annually is recommended to reinforce your company's safety philosophy and procedures and keep the issue of safety at the forefront of employees' minds. Safety training is recommended when employees change jobs within the company that involve new hazards. Also, some specific OSHA regulations require annual training. Safety training methods should be interactive and even job-specific for maximum effectiveness. Employers should avoid the tendency of having employees passively watch training videos.

To develop a training plan, the following general approach can be used:

- **Determine your safety training requirements**
What applicable OSHA regulations include training requirements? Beyond regulatory compliance, are there any other sources that require safety training (e.g. customers, vendors, contractors, trade associations)
- **Determine which employees will receive what training**
While all employees should receive new-hire and annual refresher training, not all employees will need training on every topic. For example, clerical employees may not need forklift training.
- **Determine length of time needed for each training topic and schedule dates and times for each training**
Be sure to coordinate with other departments in your company so as not to overlap or double-book employees. Verify your training plan with management to ensure there are no conflicts or issues to consider, such as production demands.
- **Develop and assemble training materials (presentations, handouts, visual aids, props)**
- **Document all safety training**
At a minimum, training records should be kept for as long as the employee is employed with the company and possibly longer, depending on company policy or applicable regulation.
- **Schedule "make-up" training sessions**