Measuring Safety Performance to Achieve Long Term Improvement

By James C. Manzella

Description: James C. Manzella presents six steps to implementing a shift toward a safety system that emphasizes "conformance to established methods and correction of system deficiencies," and thus a cultural change that seeks to bring risks to their lowest levels.

Source: *Professional Safety*, vol. 44, no. 9: pp. 33-37

Summary: Safety systems traditionally using lagging indicators and regulatory compliance as measures of safety performance but have not seen long-term improvement. Manzella explains that this attention to *downstream* measures and injury rates is insufficient to identify opportunities to improve the system in the long term, and thus work against the "accident cycle."

Because the implementation of *leading* measures requires somewhat of a cultural shift, Manzella offers six steps to achieving a more proactive safety system.

Step 1: Establish Standards. *Standards* must be well-defined and documented with clear instructions that reflect work values, company culture, and be agreeable to all. Assessment and analysis of data must be done with the same metrics. Documentation and common systems ensure measurements are not subject to interpretation.

Step 2: Set Priorities. "Areas in which the greatest risk reduction can be achieved should be targeted," like safety critical behaviors as "activities associated with lockout/tagout and entering confined spaces….Controls are adequate for a [key safety program element] when: 1) written instructions on how to perform activities are developed; 2) a system to measure conformance/non-conformance is established; 3) preventative actions are implemented to address measured non-conformance….Addressing factors that foster non-compliance will reduce risks and improve long-term statistical performance."

Step 3: Agreement. Employees' input in developing work procedures will help ensure employees' commitment to following them. "Once agreed upon, each employee must be held accountable for conforming with the standard."

Step 4: Accountability. "To achieve long-term improvement: 1) Each employee must perform all assigned tasks according to established, agreed-upon standards at all times. 2) Each employee must be held accountable for conformance….Line management must not only show employees to perform assigned tasks, it must also monitor activities and take corrective action to ensure that instructions are followed."

Step 5: Communication. "Injury/illness prevention depends on the active participation of all personnel," and active participation is encouraged by routine practical communication among that personnel. "To achieve this, all personnel must understand 1) their roles in

achieving company objectives, 2) their responsibilities and 3) performance expectations." As part of this routine communication, each employee should understand "1) short- and long-term objectives of the safety program; 2) strategy for achieving objectives; 3) the organization's commitment to safety performance excellence." Periodic updates on the achievement of safety goals should be provided "at meetings or through other mediums."

Step 6: Measurement. Upon completion of the system's design, its success in preventing incidents must be measured. "To determine which elements to measure, management can review several resources, including: incident/accident investigation reports; past observations and deficiencies; employee suggestions; site safety and health inspections; safety and health audits." Upon recognizing non-conformance, "preventative actions should be identified and incorporated into future plans in order to improve the system, not merely to address the individual incident."