

Leading Measures for Improving Safety Performance

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Description: Earl Blair of Indiana University and Barry Spurlock of the Midwestern Insurance Alliance presented this conference paper for the 2007 ASSE Professional Development Conference. It demonstrates the need for safety systems to rely less on trailing measures and incorporate leading measures to improve safety performance.

[Source](#)

Paper Introduction: One of the biggest problems in workplace safety is the way it is measured. There are numerous problems with traditional safety measures (i.e., various forms of injury rates, worker's compensation costs, etc.). Reliance upon these types of measures keeps organizations from progressing, and they are often counterproductive to "real" safety performance. As more SH&E professionals recognize the measurement problem, many have become motivated to learn how to develop an effective safety management system that includes a mix of trailing and leading indicators (Bevington). Organizations have changed how they measure other aspects of performance with the increasing popularity of the Balanced Scorecard approach. A better approach to safety measurement versus the exclusive use of trailing indicators is to determine those indicators which actually drive performance in an organization, and ensure an appropriate focus on those measures.

Today's safety professional is being exposed to an ever increasing amount of published information and seminars about the topic of safety performance measurement. It has been the authors' experience when speaking on the subject that the increasing amount of information is being met with a hearty welcome by the profession. Furthermore, the demand for the information certainly appears to be much greater than the supply. One particular aspect of safety performance measurement that has quickly become the most prominent interest is that of strategic development of measures that impact performance; the "how to" of development and implementation. The fact that safety professionals have been aware, and even frustrated, by the limitations of traditional safety measures for quiet sometime explains why they have quickly zoomed their attention to gaining management support for, and the know how to implement leading indicator measurement systems. While there is certainly no panacea for every organization, there are sound, fundamental strategies that all organizations can follow to develop measures to continuously improve safety performance.