

A decorative graphic in the top left corner consisting of a cluster of various geometric shapes like squares, triangles, and circles in shades of gray and white, arranged in a somewhat circular pattern.

CASE STUDY

A SAFER WORKPLACE... ONE DAY AT A TIME

Since partnering with DEKRA Insight, Vita Plus has steadily streamlined and enhanced employee safety programs companywide

Situation

Vita Plus was founded in 1948 by Lyle Hill and Wally Henderson in a small barn situated in a rural area near Madison, Wisconsin. Within a few months, the operation expanded to a modest 50-by-50-foot block building to accommodate production growth. A decade later, the feed manufacturing tower was built (still in use today), which represented Vita Plus's commitment to supplying quality livestock feed products for the long haul. Later the same year, the company made another significant step forward with the hiring of a full-time staff nutritionist.

Early on, Vita Plus focused primarily on the swine and poultry markets before later expanding into dairy, swine, beef, and forages as well as grain banking and merchandizing services. The company also owns CF Transport, the reliable and timely delivery component of the business. One of the most important events occurred in 1986 when Vita Plus became employee-owned. Vita Plus currently serves customers in eight upper Midwest states and a workforce approaching 400 employees.

While the consistent growth of Vita Plus was good for the bottom line, necessitating expansion and additional locations, establishing new facilities and increasing workforce also presented challenges for safety. With more employees and locations came more risk of incident and injury, along with additional reporting, recordkeeping, and regulatory requirements. So, the company turned to DEKRA Insight for help.

Solution

When safety director Scott Hall joined Vita Plus in 2012, one of the company's location managers had previously contacted DEKRA Insight for assistance with streamlining recordkeeping and documenting incidents more effectively, and improving safety-related training programs. He felt the DEKRA Insight's safety management system (SMS) was a good foundation, but wanted to build on it by using more of the system's features and capabilities.

“The safety program was pretty much de-centralized at the time,” says Hall. “Since employee safety stands at the top of Vita Plus’s list of values, I wanted to bring everybody to a more centralized focus by establishing a recordkeeping and reporting system that would allow us to track and record incidents more efficiently and allow all location managers easy access. In order for us to accomplish this, all information needed to be in one place and easily accessible, and that’s exactly what the DEKRA Insight safety application allows us to do.”

The web-based SMS application enables users to record a vast amount of information from several different sources—all stored in one place. Staff can then translate the information into easy-to-read reports that position safety personnel to effectively analyze where they need to allocate additional resources. There’s no software or subsequent updates to install on multiple computers and no maintenance as updates are reflected immediately once activated.

What makes the system applications so effective is the ability to bring information together in one convenient, accessible, and empowering database. The SMS application provides control, consistency, and continuity for documenting safety processes, a formula proven to successfully lower incidents and severity of job-related exposures and injuries.

Hall readily admits the process of centralizing information and streamlining incident reporting among all Vita Plus locations has been a difficult journey. But despite temporary periods of impatience, Hall is encouraged by the progress.

“It is a gradual, day-by-day process,” he says. “It takes patience, perseverance, encouragement, and sometimes a bit of hand-holding. There is always some degree of resistance to change in any organization, especially when trying to implement a new system that is unfamiliar, especially for those who haven’t worked much with

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computers and the Internet. But once they become familiar and more comfortable, they start gaining an appreciation for the many capabilities of the SMS application and how it can reduce recordkeeping and recording time.”

No more searching through a myriad of file folders housed at several locations to access specific information, which Hall says was a very time-consuming and often frustrating process.

“It now only takes a couple of clicks and I can access desired information most efficiently. And for me specifically, the Web-based application is convenient since I can be anywhere and access a specific record, then forward on to the facility’s printer instantly. It’s been a real time-saver that has also alleviated a lot of frustration.”

Results

Vita Plus has been gradually adopting SMS among all its locations, and while recorded incidents haven’t been significantly reduced yet, Hall points out that the company has also added several more employees, which increases exposure to risk.

“The more employees, the greater risk of an injury or incident,” he says. “All employee safety programs are a work in progress; nothing happens overnight. But since we have adopted and used more of the system’s capabilities throughout all of our 13 locations, we are experiencing respectable improvement. Our different facilities are learning from mistakes made by someone else and learning from it.”

“We are learning to work more safely from each other, albeit gradually,” Hall continues. “And the safer we are and the fewer injuries we have, the more productive and efficient we are as a company overall.”