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Article Abstract

Student Paper: Behavioral Based Safety: Solution of the Past or Key to the Future
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Traditionally, most safety and health programs have been based on regulatory compliance, creating a controlled, hazard free work environment. A variety of program approaches have aided professionals in correcting environmental conditions including audits, system safety, employee training. Recordables and lost time typically served as indicators of a successful program, and this data continues to serve a significant role in safety.

Recently, there has been a shift by some firms toward management driven safety programs, elevating safety awareness into the everyday business environment. These companies are making safety a higher status, reflecting the value business places on the productivity of their employees. At-risk behaviors have been identified as the leading cause of incidents. Consequently, many safety and health professionals now focus on changing safety in the workplace from a routine practice to an intrinsic value of all employees. However, there must come a change in culture, "...where everyone feels responsible (not just their own safety and that of others)." (Geller)

This new wave in safety focused toward behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions of employees. Behavioral based safety (BBS) consulting firms were established throughout the country, with professionals in the implementation of this concept. Most of the approaches promoted essentially applied principles and methods of behavioral psychology, such as observation to reinforce or correct behaviors. Firms usually have an inventory of common at-risk behaviors from regular observations of employees. These records then provide professionals with a database used to address the concerns indicated by at-risk behaviors. Commercial programs such as Behavior Science Technology (BST), Dupont, and Safety Performance Solutions allow for the integration of principles into existing programs.

Is behavioral based safety the direction of future safety programs? Although this new approach was well received by most professionals, and some still consider it the "magic bullet" of safety, it remains undecided on its effective implementation in safety management systems. More specific concerns expressed are the cost for training participants in observations, establishing a database of at-risk behaviors, and time required away from production to conduct observations (Norman). It has also been noted that the behaviorist approach is only effective while the behavior is observed and feedback is given consistently and in a timely manner. (John Kamp) It is

continually observe all employees so at-risk behaviors go unnoticed and uncorrected at time.

Has Behavioral based safety has reached a plateau in efficiency and cost-effectiveness? health professionals are contemplating the next generation in safety programs. Whether programs include behavioral safety principles, cognitive psychology, or other methodologies address the safety culture of an organization, they are sure to incorporate the strengths of these programs. A qualitative analysis of current safety programming is needed to identify program effectiveness, and examine program review procedure.

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