

Companies tell how they used management techniques and programs to improve workplace safety.

Coaching for Safety in Residential Roofing

By David P. Gilkey, Phillip Bigelow, Ph.D., Jeff Gilbert, Curt Boyd, Scott Greenstein, Sheila Stanley and Jim Dixon

The two most profound things that changed the effectiveness of our company safety program were switching from piecework to hourly wages and implementing a drug and alcohol program," reports Curt Boyd, CEO and owner of Academy Roofing Inc., Aurora, Colo. Nearly 20 years ago, Boyd graduated from the University of Wyoming hoping to become a teacher and coach. Teaching jobs were scarce, so Boyd worked as a superintendent for a roofing company for four years after college before he founded Academy Roofing and began a coaching career in the business world, not the classroom.

The Importance of Safety Meetings

The business doors opened in 1980, and by 1984 Boyd had 75 employees. There were no on-the-job injuries for the first three years, but eventually some employees began experiencing reportable injuries. In January 1985, Boyd took control and decided to coach his workers on safety in the workplace. He conducted his first safety meeting that included information on safe work practices, costs, concerns and medical care.

Attitude, awareness, concentration and experience (AACE) was developed and became the company slogan that was embroidered on sweat shirts provided to the employees. The company implemented monthly safety meetings and the topics, presenters and focus varied widely to expose work-

ers to the multitude of issues surrounding safe work practices and the impact on business.

The corporate culture at the company embraced safety wholeheartedly; workers were involved and the benefits of change were evident.

Throughout the recession in Colorado during the mid to late 1980s, the company shrank in size to 45 workers, but the monthly safety meetings continued. In 1990, a vicious hailstorm resulted in a tremendous demand for roofing services. The staff quickly grew to more than 100 workers. This rapid growth made it difficult to train new employees in safe work practices and injuries began to increase. Therefore, the company instituted a fall protection plan and purchased safety belts and ropes.

Establishing a Company Policy

On Dec. 31, 1990, an employee who failed to use the provided fall protection equipment fell off a roof and suffered a serious head injury. The injured employee was out of work for eight months before he was able to return to permanently modified work. The emotional devastation of his injury seriously impacted the company and the financial costs exceeded \$400,000.

Immediately, the company instituted a policy that employees must wear fall protection equipment when they are working on a roof. Some workers felt hampered by this rule and left the company for less strict employers who did not require cumbersome safety equipment. Injury rates at the company began to decrease and the company set up a training program. Journeyman Training required all new hires to spend their first two weeks on the

job with the most qualified and safest working company veterans.

Developing a Safety Program

The company hired a full-time safety director in 1992 who was directed to develop a comprehensive written safety program that included fall protection, safety awareness, hazard communication, first-aid protocols, designated medical management, field audits, and incentives for workers. The goals were to effectively manage health and safety for the well-being of the workers at the company and to comply with all OSHA regulations.

In addition, the company instituted a mandatory drug and alcohol screening program that provided employees with 30 days advance notice before being tested. "If you came up dirty, you got fired and only one man got fired the first time we tested," reported Boyd. From implementation to date, six random tests are performed weekly. The overall results of this program were astounding and included improved quality of work, better work attendance, less absenteeism, improved camaraderie and worker cohesiveness, and improved overall worker satisfaction. Finally, each work crew could count on each person equally for the right attitude, awareness, concentration and experience.

In 1993, the company began a modified return-to-work program for injured workers. Working with

doctors and injured employees, jobs were reshaped to accommodate injured workers with impaired capabilities and limitations. The message sent to all the workers was one of caring and concern, as well as a reminder that employees are a valuable asset to the company even if they have been hurt. The severity rate plummeted during the next several years to zero by 1997.

The company shifted all workers from a piece-pay-rate to hourly wages. No longer would there be an incentive to sacrifice safety for speed. Working safely was imperative. Jeff Gilbert, the new safety director, enforced constant compliance with company health and safety rules and policies.

The company obtained Cost Containment Certification for its excellence in safety and health management from the Workers' Compensation Premium Cost Containment Program, sponsored by the Department of Labor and Employment, Division of Workers' Compensation. This program paved the way for progressive discounts and savings experienced to date. (See figure below.)

In 1995, Academy Roofing became involved with HomeSafe through the Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Denver (HBA). Gilbert, supported by Boyd, became an active HBA team member working with OSHA Region VIII Administrator, Bart Chadwick, and his team to develop the HomeSafe Pilot Program. Academy Roofing became a fundamental force in shaping the HomeSafe Program's 10 Point List. The company's presence remained on the forefront over the next three years of HomeSafe's development.

Academy Roofing has invested more than \$100,000, since 1994, in new fall protection and other safety equipment. In 1996, a comprehensive 7-hour new hire safety training program was instituted. Available for new hire employees who pass their drug and alcohol

Preliminary HomeSafe Indicator Academy Roofing Loss Run Analysis

	1993	1994	1995	1996	% Change
Number of employees	165	152	164	176	+6.25%
Incident rate	23.7	26.9	18.4	13.1	-45.00%
Severity rate	54.4	100	51.5	2.5	-99.00%
Medical costs	\$51,650	\$55,011	\$29,193	\$7,306	-86.00%
Compensation costs	\$59,674	\$22,214	\$7,143	\$34	-99.95%
Experience modification rate	0.77	0.69	0.74	0.65	-16.00%

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The company instituted a policy that employees must wear fall protection equipment when they are working on a roof.

screening test, the program encompasses all of the company's safety, health and company policies and is presented in both Spanish and English. Teaching methods include visual, auditory and kinesthetic approaches to maximize learning effectiveness.

The big payoff came in 1997 when the company maintained one complete year of no lost time injuries. The experience modification rate plummeted to 0.47, an all-time low. The workers' compensation premium dividend was so great, Boyd took 50 of his employees who had maintained full-time jobs with the company for the entire year to Las Vegas for a weekend of fun and celebration. The coaching paid off for the long-term employees who had learned to work safely.

The company celebrates its success with the annual Academy Awards, a time of recognition for the many accomplishments and commitments of employees. Boyd believes that he is fair and his company affords an opportunity for people to work and provide quality service, make a living and take pride in that experience.

Conclusion

Today, Boyd attributes the changes in safety and health management to a switch from passive to aggressive management of this area of his business. Overall productivity, quality and cost efficiency have increased since he decided to coach his employees on working smarter, not harder.

The focus of the company is on employees, not costs. Boyd found that cost reductions follow good management practices and he still attends at least half of the company safety meetings. He enjoys speaking to his employees personally, encouraging them to work safely and stay healthy for themselves and the people they love.

Gilbert has remained involved with the HomeSafe Pilot Program launched in January 1997 by HBA and OSHA. To all of the HomeSafe Partners, Academy Roofing serves as an example of how success in safety can be achieved. **CM**

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