

Collision Shops Improve Safety Through CARSS

As a shop owner, you know what makes good business sense: Quality repair work, satisfied customers, reliable employees and a safe shop. Your expertise and experience enable you to recognize quality repair work, but how do you *know* if you have a safe shop? If you think that “zero accidents” indicates a safe shop and that you will pass an OSHA inspection, *you may be in for a surprise!* Take a moment and read about the findings of the Collision Auto Repair Safety Study (CARSS).

CARSS, a research collaboration between the University of Minnesota and Park Nicollet Institute, was funded by a federal grant. (For more background information, read Joel Gausten’s article in the August 2010 issue of this magazine.) AASP-MN was our main partner and we worked closely with Executive Director Judell Anderson throughout the study. Many members generously volunteered their time to assist with preparing the study materials and recruiting participants. *(Thank you! We could have not done this without you!)*

Forty-nine collision shops in the greater Twin Cities and St. Cloud area participated in the study between 2009 and 2012. Of these, 33 shops were AASP-MN members. During the initial visit, the shop’s safety programs and practices were evaluated. Shop owners received a report of the findings and decided which issues to correct over the next year. All shops received the following free services: Safety consultation, access to employee safety training, written safety program templates, checklists, information about job hazards and solutions, medical evaluation for respirator users and respirator fit testing. After one year, 45 shops were visited again and workplace safety was re-evaluated.

The findings of our initial and follow-up visits are shown in Table 1. The survey used in the study had 92 questions divided into eight sections. For analysis, some questions were also grouped in three categories. The initial evaluation shows that only 54 percent of the safety items were present in the shops. At follow-up, 71 percent of the items were present – an increase of 17 percent. The greatest improvement occurred in *Written safety documentation and records* (41 percent). On the other hand, *Facility and equipment safety* improved by only five percent.

Now, let’s refer to Table 2 and take a closer look at some specific items from

these categories. Most shops were not aware that several OSHA standards require training and documentation of training (including a summary of the topics covered). For example, only 16 percent of the shops were up to date with the annual training requirement of the Right-to-Know standard at the time of the first visit. At follow-up, the number increased to 62 percent. Similar training requirements apply when respirators (annual), personal protective equipment (initial and as needed) and fire extinguishers (annual if employees are expected to use them) are used in your shop.

The following facility safety issues were among the high-risk items, many of which showed the least amount of improvement: Lack of GFCI outlet(s) in locations where electrical equipment is used when water is present, damaged electrical cords

on shop- and employee-owned equipment and lack of grounding and bonding of the flammable liquid containers. All these issues are relatively easy and inexpensive to fix.

Data were analyzed to identify the factors that could have influenced shops’ safety performance. The findings were surprising. None of the following factors were of significance either at baseline or at follow-up: Size of the business, AASP-MN membership status or owner’s age, industry experience or education. However, shops that were working with or had worked with a safety consultant had better safety when they entered the study. This difference was no longer observed at follow-up. This is a very important finding, because it shows

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Table 1	Survey question	% shops that answered YES		
		Initial	Follow-up	% Change
<i>Written safety documentation and records</i>				
	Was Right-to-Know training conducted in the past 12 months?	16	62	46
	Are MSDS sheets available to all employees?	29	60	31
	Does the shop have a written Respirator Program?	22	73	51
	Were the respirator users fit-tested in the past 12 months?	20	67	47
	Do respirator users have medical certification?	22	69	47
	Were the respirator users trained in the past 12 months?	18	73	55
<i>Facility and equipment safety</i>				
	Are unguarded openings in the electrical panels?	24	24	0
	Are electrical cords on employee- and shop-owned equipment in good condition? (examine 5 random cords)	31	22	-9
	Are flammable liquid containers grounded?	36*	55*	19
	Are GFCI present where electric tools and water are used?	44*	81*	37
	Are emergency doors unlocked?	73	84	11
	Is there a fire suppression system in the paint booth?	76	84	8
	Are there explosion proof lights in the paint booth?	94	91	-3

Table 2		% Items Present		
		Initial	Follow-up	Change
Overall		54	71	17
By section:	Safety in the shop and Right to Know training	38	68	30
	Emergency planning, first aid and fire prevention	60	73	13
	Compressed gases	81	81	0
	Paint booth and mixing room	50	56	6
	Ergonomics	64	73	9
	Electrical and machine safety and lockout/tagout	69	75	6
	PPE: ears, eyes and skin	58	77	19
	Respiratory protection	41	78	37
By category:	<i>Facility and equipment safety</i>	70	76	5
	<i>Written safety documentation and records</i>	18	59	41
	<i>Personal protective equipment (PPE)</i>	74	86	12

** of the shops in which this item was assessed*

Feature

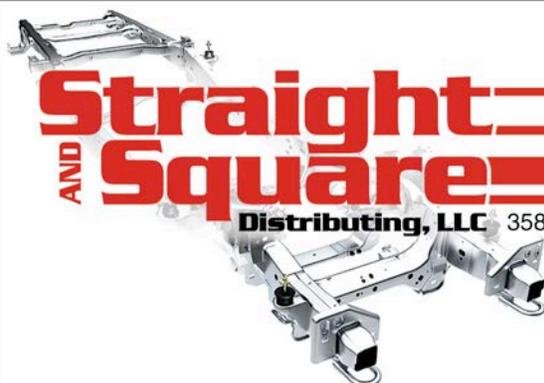
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that after one year of study participation, shops without consultants “caught up” with their peers.

You may wonder if the shops will maintain or even continue to improve their health and safety programs and practices now that the study has ended. This is an excellent question. We are visiting many of the shops again to determine just that, and hope to have an answer for you soon!

While we are no longer offering direct assistance to shops, the materials created during the study are still available on our website: www.repairsafety.com. If you would like to evaluate safety in your shop, use our topic-specific checklists and the information in the four newsletters. We are in the process of updating and adding safety information and training for mechanical shops. Our next article will explain the changes and the new services you will have access to.

We welcome your questions and comments. Contact Anca Bejan at (952) 993-3287 or bejana@parknicollet.com and Maryellen Skan at (952) 993-3008 or skanma@parknicollet.com.

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Lake Elmo, MN

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