Section 5
Communication – Key to Safety

Action Items

Communicating Safety

1. Establish a clear-cut, easy, and non-threatening method by which employees can make safety suggestions or register safety concerns.

2. Act promptly on all safety suggestions and respectfully inform those making the suggestions of your actions, whether or not you accept them. If you do not accept them, give the person(s) making the suggestion(s) a carefully thought-out, respectful explanation of your reasons.

3. At all times, tailor your words and actions to reflect full support of safety and safety suggestions. This is especially important when things need to get done in a hurry, a time when accidents are more likely to happen.

4. Give instructions for new or non-routine tasks to employees in the following manner to be 90% certain that what you want done is done safely and correctly:
   a. Tell the employee what to do and, if possible, show it being done correctly.
   b. Ask the employee to repeat the instructions back to you, and check to see if they are correct.
   c. Ask the employee if he/she sees any way to improve on these instructions, or how the task is to be done.
   d. Discuss suggested changes and agree on the final procedure.
   e. To the extent possible, have the employee demonstrate the correct procedure to you.
   f. Write down the agreed-upon steps or amend previously written procedures and include it in an alphabetized file of correct operating procedures.

5. Do not reward unsafe behavior. Punish employees who violate safety rules. (You will need careful preplanning of step-by-step disciplinary procedures and communication of these procedures to employees).
   a. Employees who display unsafe behavior must be disciplined as soon as practicable.
   b. Employees who make light of safety procedures or who in any way encourage others to ignore safe practices, must be disciplined immediately.
Questions & Answers — Once You Understand the Reasons for The Answers Given, You Have the Opportunity to Make Great Progress in Both Safety and Efficiency.

1. When an accident occurs the company should: a) ___ Determine who is at fault and assess a fair penalty, b) ___ Search for the root cause and correct the problem, c) a & b ___

2. Accidents are, for the most part, the result of improper employee behavior. True ___, False ___. Employee behavior may be the immediately-observable cause, but employee behavior is usually determined by the importance management places on safe and healthy workplace engineering controls and practices.

3. The best way to find out about hazards in your workplace is: a) ___ Do the required walk-around inspection, b) ___ Read all MSHA regulations, c) ___ Establish open communication with all employees and convince them to discuss their safety-related concerns. Experienced employees know best where the hazards are. They are the ones who, if not intimidated or belittled by supervisors or peers, can best describe dangerous jobs and close calls they have experienced, which is fundamental information for identifying needed improvements. If they fear that such discussion will lead to belittling remarks, they will withhold the information to protect themselves.

4. For the most part, employees get hurt as the result of having a bad attitude, which is reflected in their work ethic. True ___, False ___. Accident statistics in the mining industry indicate that the most conscientious employees (those that companies promote into supervisory positions) have a high frequency of fatalities. These are the people who feel the need to get the job done and are often willing to risk their health or even their life to make it happen. They may also feel they are the only ones that can undertake dangerous tasks without getting killed.

5. If the supervisor warns an employee about a hazard in clear English and the employee gets hurt by the hazard, it is clearly the employee’s fault. True ___, False ___. You will understand this better after you read the answers to questions 6 through 11.

6. When explaining something to an employee, you should expect him/her to retain: 10 %___, 20 %___, 30 %___, 50 %___, 70 %___, or 90 %___.

7. If you give an employee something to read, you should expect him/her to retain: 10 %___, 20 %___, 30 %___, 50 %___, 70 %___, or 90 %___.

8. If you explain something to an employee and draw a picture you should expect him/her to retain: 10 %___, 20 %___, 30 %___, 50 %___, 70 %___, or 90 %___.

9. If you show an employee something you should expect him/her to retain: 10 %___, 20 %___, 30 %___, 50 %___, 70 %___, or 90 %___.

10. If you get an employee to explain something back to you, you should expect him/her to retain: 10 %___, 20 %___, 30 %___, 50 %___, 70 %___, or 90 %___.

11. If you get an employee to do something and explain how he/she did it, you should expect him/her to retain: 10 %___, 20 %___, 30 %___, 50 %___, 70 %___, or 90 %___.

12. Safety improvements are most likely to result from: a) ___ very detailed accident investigation, b) ___ establishment of the cause and determination of who is to blame,
c) open-communication to determine hazards, prioritization to determine which ones to focus on, and continuous improvement. While MSHA requires the company and inspectors to conduct detailed accident investigations, detailed accident investigation can easily turn into a “blame another – protect myself” game. In general, when an accident occurs, most people learn to keep silent to avoid losing or hurting friends, being blamed themselves, providing information for attorneys looking for easy money, etc., making this the most difficult time to look for the unbiased information required to make needed improvements.

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The decision to make safety improvements should: 1) require approval by as many levels of management as possible, 2) require approval by as few levels of management as possible. Think of it this way – if the first person can say yes or no you may have a 50% chance of getting the job done, if his boss can say yes or no, it may drop to 1/2 of 50% or 25%, if his boss can say yes or no it may drop to 12.5% and so on. Furthermore, the likelihood of the suggestion dying on someone’s desk due to the person’s other commitments increases with the number of approvers. Also the time it takes for an important safety suggestion to be implemented increases with each level of approval required. This is discouraging to the person(s) who made the suggestion who may conclude that “nobody really wants or cares about safety in this company”.

An accident which results from an employee behavior-related cause, is definitely the employees fault. True ___, False ___.

The employee may not be suited to the task assigned (nobody can do everything well). The employee may not be trained in the hazards and correct operating procedures for the task assigned. These are management responsibilities.

However, even if the employee knows all of the safe procedures (management’s responsibility) and is told by management to be safe, any employee can read between the lines. For example, If an employee gets frowns or negative statements from the boss or co-workers about taking time to be safe or about suggestions to improve safety, or if he sees that those who take dangerous shortcuts are in management’s favor, the employee will soon learn to modify his/her behavior. An employee wants his boss’s approval regardless of whether or not he likes the boss.

When the employee becomes discouraged, he/she will probably stop making suggestions and begin to eliminate steps required to do the job safely. To avoid this common occurrence, managers must take the time to communicate in a positive way with employees to arrive at safer and more efficient ways to do a job (two heads are far better than one). Over the long run, this strategy will pay big dividends in improved safety and efficiency as well as in the employees becoming contributors to both safety and efficiency. The employee will feel rewarded knowing that he/she is respected by management and is making a positive contribution to the company that is appreciated. The result will be a happier, safer and more efficient workforce.

Supervisor behavior has only a very small effect on safety in the workplace. True ___, False ___.

Clearly-written, step-by-step procedures that are safe should be followed for all tasks that have associated dangers and these procedures should never be changed. True ___, False ___
The first part is true, but continuous improvement is the only way to a safe workplace.

17. Competition between employees or employee groups is a good way to motivate employees to safer behavior. True ___, False ___. *Completion between employees or employee groups destroys cooperation in achieving company-wide goals and leads to obstructive behavior to achieve individual goals.*

18. Giving awards is a good way to promote safe behavior. True ___, False ___. *Awards for meeting lost time quotas etc. are likely to lead to employees not reporting accidents or near misses that, if not communicated to the right people, could result in more devastating accidents at a later date.*
Supervisor Self-Assessment Eye Opener – Do I Reward Unsafe Behavior? If your response is the answer marked, give yourself credit for rewarding unsafe behavior. You should conclude that rewarding unsafe behavior comes natural, but it takes careful thought and determination to truly reward safe behavior.

1) Do you:
   a) Fail to express gratitude when an employee points out a safety concern? – Yes ___ No ___
   b) Fail to take immediate action when you are made aware of safety concerns? Yes ___ No ___
   c) Fail to communicate to the person who expressed a safety concern that action has been taken or respectfully convince the person that the action was not needed or a different action is needed? Yes ___ No ___
   d) Praise the employee who gets the job done faster without regard for safety or criticize the employee who takes extra steps to ensure that safe practices are followed? Yes ___ No ___
   e) Allow other employees to make remarks about safety-minded employees? Yes ___ No ___
   f) Look with disdain at safety-minded employees because they “waste too much time worrying”? Yes ___ No ___
   g) Fail to punish repeated unsafe behavior that the employee is clearly aware of? Yes ___ No ___
   h) Set a bad example for your employees by taking chances? Yes ___ No ___
   i) Complain about MSHA rules to your employees? Yes ___ No ___

2) Do you have an understanding with employees about actions that will be taken if safety rules are violated – for example, warning for the first offense, 3 day layoff for second, longer layoff for third, and discharge for continued disregard of rules? Yes ___ No ___

3) Do you have clear procedures employees must follow when they find an unsafe condition or become aware of an unsafe practice? Yes ___ No ___
   a) Are your employees instructed to stop operating equipment immediately when they have discovered a safety concern? Yes ___ No ___
   b) Are employees who do not stop working when safety concerns arise punished? Yes ___ No ___
   c) Is it easy for employees to contact you or a designated person as soon as they encounter a problem? Yes ___ No ___
   d) Does the reporting mechanism allow the employee to report concerns privately to minimize inhibition due to peer pressure? Yes ___ No ___
e) Is the employee who reports a safety problem with his equipment given a less-desirable job during maintenance activities or sent home without pay?
Yes ☐ No ☐

f) Do you have a good preventive maintenance program? Yes ☐ No ☐


g) How many layers of management are involved in getting a safety suggestion approved? 1 ☐, 2 ☐, 3 ☐, 4 ☐

h) Will following your example with respect to safety improve the likelihood that none of your employees are injured? Yes ☐ No ☐

i) Do you have a process in place for reviewing procedures used to conduct non-routine tasks that have associated dangers? Yes ☐ No ☐

j) Do you become involved in all employee safety meetings? Yes ☐ No ☐

4) Do you assign blame when one of your employees is involved in an incident?
Yes ☐ No ☐

a) Have your employees been adequately trained to follow procedures which would have made it possible to avoid the incident? Yes ☐ No ☐

b) Do the equipment or procedures you provide for your employees to use leave open the possibility of an accident occurring? Yes ☐ No ☐

c) Are substance abusers allowed to work while under the influence? Yes ☐ No ☐

d) Do you have a procedure for determining when an employee is not fit to work due to substance abuse, along with the corrective actions to take to avoid repercussions for the company? Yes ☐ No ☐

e) Are your employees genuinely encouraged to suggest improvements in work procedures and equipment to make their jobs safer? Yes ☐ No ☐

5) Do you consider the time you spend with employees discussing safer and more efficient ways to do a job to be a valuable investment of your time? Yes ☐ No ☐
Fundamentals That Will Improve Your Safety Performance

1. The proper foundation upon which good safety programs are built is genuine concern for the welfare of employees and their families. High costs resulting from accidents and safety violations provide additional incentive.

2. Open communication is essential to improved safety performance. Each employee must be at ease in communicating safety-related concerns without fear of reprisal or stigma. The best incentive for participation in the correction of safety-related problems is rewarding employees by timely action on their concerns. Even apparently frivolous concerns and unworkable suggestions must be considered carefully and responded to respectfully.

3. Blaming employees for accidents or injuries instills fear and distrust. This inhibits productive communication that is essential for accurately determining and correcting the causes of accidents and injuries. Blame for clear-cut criminal behavior is not included -- for example, if an employee comes to work drunk and runs over a fellow employee, criminal negligence can be established.

4. Avoid dependence on mass safety inspections to accomplish safety. Require instead statistical evidence that safety is built on. MSHA accident statistics may help initially in directing you to the areas of greatest concern, but gathering your own data is best.

5. If accident data are not available, investigate the motive for observed 'at-risk' behavior and adjust systems to compensate. Dig deep enough to identify your own responsibility and that of other managers in the matter.

6. Find problems. Target your safety performance using data on accident and injury trends, (and near misses, when available.)

7. Efforts toward improving a company’s overall safety should begin by focusing on the tasks that produce the highest numbers of serious accidents.

8. No safety management system is ever perfect and all require continual improvement. It is the responsibility of management with the help of employees to work on continual improvement.

9. Bottlenecks to correction of safety problems should be eliminated. One serious bottleneck is the number of persons in the chain of command who must approve corrective action. Simple statistics reveal that the more persons there are in this chain; the lower is the probability that corrective action will be taken. The effect is that employee incentive to participate in the improvement process is quashed.

10. Supervisors must become leaders, facilitators, coaches and counselors of the safety-improvement process. Proper attitudes must be instilled on each new employee's first day at work and these attitudes will only remain if the actions and words of managers and supervisors are consistent and continue to sincerely encourage safety suggestions and improvement.

11. Most accidents and injuries result from management system problems rather than from employee behavior. Employee behavior may be viewed as a system problem. For example, the employee isn’t self-hired to perform a particular task, is not self-trained, nor does the employee set the tone about the importance of safety in the company. Management can be indirectly responsible for building most of the barriers to safe behavior. If the system has the potential for a serious accident, in time a serious accident is likely to occur.

12. Where safety is not considered a high priority concern, and safety training is neglected, supervisors and conscientious, productive, employees who want to please their supervisors are likely to be the ones injured.
13. Clearly written, step-by-step procedures that are safe and efficient should be adhered to by all performing daily work tasks that have associated dangers. These procedures should be followed until safer procedures have been established. Safety and efficiency often go hand in hand.

14. Solutions to safety-related problems must not be "cast in concrete". All solutions are subject to improvement, the need for which should be based on frequent reviews and charting of incidence records.

15. Remove any barriers that would prevent the hourly employee from working safely. Eliminate the need for making choices of Quality vs. Production vs. Safety. All are important and none will be optimized if the others are ignored. Supervisors must always be looking for barriers to safe employee behavior, including employee fears about taking action on safety concerns that might require the stopping of production, or other action that would incur the anger of management or fellow employees.

16. Zero accidents is not an unreasonable goal because no one wants to be injured or killed. If you doubt this ask yourself – do I want to lose my eyes today?

17. Competition between employees or employee groups destroys cooperation in achieving company-wide goals and leads to obstructive behavior to achieve individual goals.

18. The need for choosing between safety and productivity should not exist. The word "production" should not be used without the adjective "safe". Continual improvement in safety is profitable.