

# One Red-Hot Success Story

Nikkei M.C. Aluminum America reached a safety milestone—120,000 injury-free hours—and rewarded its 80 employees for the achievement.

by *Stephanie A. Dean*

### Challenge

In a place where temperatures can reach 125 degrees and heavy forklift traffic is a constant, safety is bound to be an extreme challenge. With 80 employees in an aluminum smelting facility, achieving any significant safety milestone may seem like a far-fetched concept. Surprisingly, Nikkei M.C. Aluminum America, located in Columbus, Ind., has had few lost-time incidents over time. Although the site has had some real peaks and valleys in its incident rates, incidents have been fairly minimal on the grand scale of harm to employee and employer.

### Solution

The management at Nikkei made the commitment to safety and made it a priority. Safety is embraced at all levels of the organization—from the president down to the plant floor workers. Nikkei's current president, Shigeru "Steve" Suzuki, was dispatched to the Columbus facility in 2004 and came in with safety as one of his highest priorities. He was insistent on educating people on safe and healthy lifestyles, both at work and at home. In doing so, he knew the employees at Nikkei would be more motivated, productive, and engaged.

The initial goal set by management as an incentive for employees was to attain 60,000 injury-free hours, which equals approximately five months for Nikkei based on the number of employees it has and the number of hours worked per week. Employees are fully aware of the safety objectives, what is expected of each individual, and the results of not complying. Nikkei has a formal disciplinary action program for employees who do not abide by the safety program, but the company seems to have few issues with people not cooperating. Shawn Fosnight, Nikkei's Safety & Process trainer, said employees truly buy into the safety culture and are always looking out for one another.

To gain employee participation, Nikkei

has an ongoing safety committee that involves employees by rotating people through the committee. Participation on the committee is mandatory at some point during an individual's employment with Nikkei. Employees on the committee are responsible for addressing safety concerns and completing various safety audits throughout the organization.

The company also has a team designated P.A.R.T. (Post Accident Review Team), which incorporates reviews of both accidents and near-misses. The team consists of the president; senior vice president; general manager, human resources; Safety & Process trainer; the leader of the involved department; and the direct supervisor of the individual. Involving people from all levels of the organization ensures the issue is taken very seriously and that improvements are made in order to avoid a recurrence of the incident.

In addition to the initiatives by management, Fosnight uses the interactive features of the online safety management tool KellerOnline® to research, develop, and implement various safety programs. He said the tool "has played a major role in the continued improvement of our safety programs. I have used everything from the audits and handbook creator to the peer discussion boards and personal assistant features. The tool has been a solid resource in helping me to find what I was looking for."

### Results

The last time the Nikkei facility had a lost-time accident was in June 2006. By making safety a priority, Nikkei has achieved more than 120,000 injury-free hours—twice its original goal.

Employee participation has been key to the organization's success. "Safety has always been first here, but what makes it so successful is the fact that it has become our culture, and it no longer seems like a task," said Marla Satterfield, general manager of

### NIKKEI M.C. ALUMINUM AMERICA

Located in Columbus, Ind., the 80-employee company is a secondary aluminum smelter that supplies aluminum alloys to the die-cast and gravity-casting industries. As a smelter, the company recycles scrap metal and turnings by melting it in one of three reverberatory furnaces to produce different aluminum alloys. The final product, an 11-pound ingot or crucibles of molten aluminum, is then sold to companies that use it to produce wheels, master cylinders, transmissions, garden tools, and many other aluminum products.

Human Resources. "Simple, routine safety activities such as steel-toe boots, safety glasses, flame-resistant uniforms, and shields are still a huge part of our efforts, they are just often overlooked."

The 120,000 hours was achieved by the combined efforts of all 80 employees at Nikkei. Only time an employee was actually at work was included in calculating the hours for this achievement—vacation and sick time did not count toward the milestone. Nikkei's production department operates 24 hours per day, seven days a week, with production employees and two shipping department employees working 12-hour shifts. The remaining staffers—shipping, receiving, maintenance, and office personnel—work traditional eight-hour shifts.

Employees at Nikkei M.C. Aluminum America were rewarded with monetary incentives at both the 60,000 and 120,000 injury-free-hour milestones. "Employees are not ignoring injuries simply to receive the incentive. They have simply learned how to live safely, both at work and at home," said Satterfield. ■

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