

Attaining 24 Months Without a Recordable Injury Did Not Come Without Struggle

Challenge – High workers' compensation costs & injuries

Struggling to go for long periods of time without a recordable injury and accruing nearly one million dollars in workers' compensation costs in a single year, SKF Sealing Solutions knew that it had to do something – and fast! The competitive nature of the business would not allow for this type of continued expenditure. SKF wanted to make a change, so it made the commitment to its employees and their families that they were going to be an industry leader in achieving safety and health wellness.

Solution – Building a safe environment through employee engagement

The commitment by SKF management was only the first step in building the safe working environment that they strived to achieve. It would also require employee engagement and commitment. Norbert Alsup, Environmental Health and Safety Manager at SKF Sealing Solutions, said, "At the point when SKF made the commitment to our employees, there was a significant lack of trust. It became our first and only priority to gain their trust and to get them to understand that they were our most valuable asset and we wanted to keep them safe. Safety, after all, is a shared responsibility. We could not succeed without having our employees on board."

The action plan started with the simple goal of changing attitudes. Using several different initiatives, the goal was to get employees to not only understand that they were valued, but to also get them to take part in the implementation of the safety program. In 2002, they elected a **safety champion** from within the plant who helped implement the change from the floor level.

SKF implemented the **5S program** (sort, straighten, standardize, shine, sustain) to train and involve employees who wanted to be involved in implementing change. Those employees were assigned to specific areas in which they performed the 5S au-

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audits. Once audits were completed, the areas were inspected by the safety team to ensure that they were in compliance with safety standards and then periodically reviewed to ensure that the improvement was sustained.

That same year the **M&M Theory** was introduced. The theory helped illustrate to employees that they were taking chances daily at work while doing their jobs. Alsup explained by saying, "Would you put your hand in

a jar knowing that there are 300 M&Ms, 29 Correctol® tablets, and 1 cyanide tablet in it and just eat them? You wouldn't do it unless you wanted to take a chance on eating a cyanide tablet. When operating equipment improperly you are taking a chance on getting hurt. You may never have been injured, but it only takes a second to have an accident." To drive the point home, and to keep this theory at the forefront of people's minds, the management at the Hobart plant saturated the place with M&Ms by placing toys, pictures, and candy throughout.

In 2003, the safety champion at the plant implemented the **Specials Program** in conjunction with

SKF corporate management. This program enabled them to go back in time and meet with people who had two or more prior injuries. They worked to further educate those employees on safety and showed concern for their safety.

SKF also began emphasizing the **safety matrix** to demonstrate the results of unsafe actions. They began to formally document when employees used unsafe actions in order to educate them on the types of things that were happen-

ing around the plant that resulted in injuries or accidents, no matter how serious. With the goal of celebrating the accomplishments surrounding safety, the **Safety Wall of Fame** was implemented to act as a visible representation of the teamwork that it takes to create zero accidents in the workplace. All employees' pictures appear on the board along with the number of years that they have worked safely.

SKF Sealing Solutions also had to go outside of the walls of its physical plant and involve their small community of Hobart, Oklahoma in order to truly get a grasp on their desire to lower workers' compensation costs

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and improve their overall safety record. Personnel charged with improving the safety and health of employees met with area doctors to discuss issues, including the types of accidents that were occurring, the number of days that doctors were prescribing employees be off of work, and better ways to keep employees safe. To continue the momentum of this effort, SKF hired a case management nurse to help manage the relationships with the healthcare providers and other community members. This effort resulted in a significant decrease in the number of days that employees were off of work due to injuries.

As a part of the post-hire, pre-em-

ployment screening, SKF implemented a program that required a **drug screening, physical exam, and dexterity evaluation**. The physical exam and screening, done at a local physical therapy clinic, tests employees using equipment that would be critical to their job functions. This testing allows SKF to see if an employee that they have offered a job is able to physically handle their duties without accident or injury. In some cases, accommodations have been made to help the new employee do their job more comfortably.

Additional incentives have been implemented in order to encourage SKF employees to work us-

ing best practices for safety. Such incentives include free coffee or nickel soda in the break room, quarterly cash drawings, and the inclusion of safety in the company's gain sharing program. Some critics believe that providing incentives for a safety program encourages people to not report injuries or accidents, but Alsup disagrees, “We have worked very hard to encourage our employees to report injuries at the first onset of pain through continued education of the importance of injury reporting. People are just generally working more safely and being conscious of the results of their actions. I don't believe that the incentives have caused an injury or accident to go unreported.”

Results – Zero accidents for 24 months

The successes of SKF Sealing Solutions' safety efforts have not come easily and they didn't happen overnight. It took a significant team effort to make their safety program a success. On April 12, 2007, the Hobart facility achieved zero accidents for 24 months. On April 13, 2007 management gave its employees the day off as a reward for making safety a priority. As a team, they had accomplished a significant milestone that many thought would never happen.

If success is measured by the number of accidents, or lack thereof, then SKF has been successful. Alsup believes, however, that the job of improving safety is never done. He said, “I will know if we succeed by understanding where we were at the beginning of the journey. In order to succeed, an organization must be willing to set and achieve a goal of zero accidents. It doesn't stop there because an organization must also maintain and continue to improve safety by being willing to listen and change. Continuous improvement is the key to success. Our safety team constantly walks the plant floor and interacts with our employees in order to seek ways to improve our plant's safety.”

Norbert Alsup was named J. J. Keller's 2006 KellerOnline® Safety Professional of the Year (SPOTY) for his efforts in helping to make safety a priority at SKF Sealing Solutions in Hobart, Oklahoma.

SKF Sealing Solutions is a leading provider of sealing solutions worldwide. Located in Hobart, Oklahoma, SKF has 200 employees, 80,000 square feet of manufacturing space, and produces more than 40 million seals per year.