

Smooth Sailing

Veolia Water North America has taken its safety to the next level through training and a focus on areas of concern.

BY DAN RYAN

Veolia Water North America, the nation's largest services provider for municipal and industrial water and wastewater systems and facilities, takes safety very seriously. Our company understands not only the impact safety has on our bottom line, but also its impact on our employees' morale and ability to go home to their families the way they left them. From 2000 to 2005, the organization saw its safety performance level off with little or no improvement, year over year.

In 2005, our company had a recordable incidence rate of 6.2 and a lost-time incidence rate of 1.4. At that time, both of these were better than the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) averages for the industry, but Veolia's leadership wanted more. The main challenges included sustaining worker and workplace safety at a heightened level at all times, improving on accident reduction, and closing the gap between the numbers of accidents occurring at industrial sites and those at municipal operations.

Veolia Water North America designs, builds, operates, and manages various types of facilities, programs, and systems, such as water and wastewater treatment and reclamation facilities, water distribution systems, wastewater collection systems, groundwater remediation systems, residuals and composting facilities and related distribution programs, and combined sewer overflow facilities. The company employs some 2,700 people and works with more than 270 municipal and industrial customers.

Incident Reporting and Accountability

With a desire to boost the organization's safety performance, management set aggressive targets for the 2006 calendar year. The targets were put in place knowing that it would take a lot of effort and dedication in order to achieve them.

Senior and regional managers did more than talk about safety; they made people accountable for working safely and were passionate about it. Targets were set for the organization with continuous improvement milestones for each geographical region of the company or operating unit and target-setting for area managers with direct oversight of assigned projects.

Key senior and regional management personnel (up to and including the president and CEO) now receive an automated Immediate Notification Report (INR) via e-mail within 24 hours after an injury, vehicle accident, or environmental incident has occurred. This INR, which is an output of Veolia's proprietary, Web-based data management software, is a condensed report that summarizes the incident location, case type, and who was involved.

This has been a critical component of our organization's success because it has forced anyone who was on the fence about safety and compliance to move to the right side. Knowing the CEO is following up on almost every incident report tells employees that the only way to avoid the spotlight is to work safely and encourage those around them to work safely, as well. Moreover, the INR is designed to make sure all incidents get prompt and appropriate resources to best manage or mitigate the event.

Each incident that occurs at Veolia is entered into the online database. It serves to document incident investigations, complete with who, what, when, and where; root cause identification; corrective and preventive actions; and assignments for responsible parties. In addition to all of its inherent monitoring, tracking, and reporting capabilities, this program complies with federal OSHA recordkeeping requirements.

Reporting and tracking alone did not allow us to achieve our targets. Our team of Environmental Health, Safety & Security professionals developed a list of key challenges

that were hindering the safety performance of the organization. For each challenge, we came up with a solution to ensure we would reduce work-related injuries and illnesses and, as a result, achieve the aggressive targets set by our company's leadership.

We have developed an annual training calendar and complete this training at sites across the country through a combination of in-house subject matter experts, e-learning modules, contractors and vendors, and monthly safety packets produced and posted on the EHS&S section of our intranet site. Allison Britzter, a member of the EHS&S staff, compiles and organizes the training materials, with each training topic including a PowerPoint® presentation complete with speaker notes, handouts, and quizzes. Providing people with everything they need to execute the training increases the likelihood that the training is executed, we've found, and this is yet another example of the corporate staff providing the tools for success and those in the field being successful.

By sharing lessons learned through internal electronic messaging, the company is also bringing awareness to the types of incidents that are occurring. When incidents occur within the organization or are featured in the news, EHS&S issues a companywide Safety Alert that includes a summary of the incident, a list of potential serious injuries that could have occurred, root cause analysis, and preventive and corrective actions.

Focused on Inattention

We launched a new initiative in January 2008 after looking at the number and type of incidents that historically occur in the month of January. We realized the incidents were not caused by inclement weather associated with the winter season; rather, they were due to an apparent lack of focus as business resumed after the holidays. In 2005, 2006, and 2007, we had experienced 21, 11, and 15 recordable incidents, respectively, during the month of January alone. But in January 2008, only six work-related injuries were recorded at Veolia Water.

We simply brought to light the misunderstanding that most of our January accidents

are the result of winter conditions—when in reality, these incidents point to an inexcusable lack of focus. Besides pointing out the problem, EHS&S prepared and senior management mandated daily Toolbox Safety Talks during the month of January 2008. EHS&S compiled safety topics and sent five of them to supervisors at the beginning of each week. By keeping safety on the top of people's minds in an aggressive and proactive manner, we successfully reduced the number of recordable cases by more than 50 percent.

As a result of this January safety awareness initiative, Veolia Water is off to an excellent start, having logged 18 recordable injuries during the first quarter of 2008, down from 35 for the same period in 2007.

Another opportunity for the organization has been to evaluate the difference between safety statistics at our municipal sites versus industrial projects, which includes refineries, primary metals, automotive, pharmaceuticals, and chemicals, to name a few. Because our safety statistics have been better at our industrial sites than at our municipal sites, we

identified the successful ingredients and pushed them out to all Veolia Water projects. This ensures employees at municipal sites are held to the same high standards and level of accountability that refinery customers hold us to while we work on their properties.

To further maximize resources with the largest potential return on investment, the company identified the 15 percent of our projects that produce upward of 80 percent of the organization's work-related accidents. Labeled "focus facilities," these sites are participating in a program that requires additional attention from the assigned EHS&S professional and additional activities by those assigned to the projects. Although these targeted sites still accounted for 43 percent of the company's accidents in 2006, this approach successfully reduced accidents at the sites by 31 percent in 2006. Work continued with these focus facilities in 2007, resulting in a further reduction in accidents at the sites by 28 percent.

Results

Veolia Water North America posted our best

employee safety statistics for a calendar year in 2006 and in 2007 had an even better year, with a recordable incidence rate of 3.8 and a lost-time incidence rate of 0.9. (These compare to the BLS averages for private-industry water, wastewater, and other systems of 5.2 and 1.6, respectively.) In addition, 85 percent of our projects are accident free and 95 percent are lost-time accident free.

Our success can be credited directly to our employees. Although we have an EHS&S staff of 14, we truly believe we have 2,700 employees with a full-time responsibility for safety and compliance. It is because of their awareness and dedication to safety that we have been successful in our efforts. **OHS**

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