

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

#157-7/11/13

A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY – ROADBLOCKS AND DETOURS CONTINUED

Safety is one of those altruistic things that, in principle, everyone is in favor of; but in the real world it is sometimes lost to competing pressures.

On occasion we have seen mutually beneficial safety programs/efforts become an area of conflict between certain workers and their managers. Some workers have tried to use safety issues to leverage power on other unrelated matters, or as an opportunity to attack their managers/supervisors. Conversely, some managers refuse to empower their workers on safety issues, and try to mandate standards in a traditional top-down style that often is diminished by mixed messages of priorities or intimidation. Safety becomes a power struggle or an area of conflict, rather than a work practice.

It is a reality that with diminished staff more is expected from individual workers. The pressure to get the job done has become a constant factor in the work place. The elements of an effective safety program are sometimes forgotten or ignored in this crunch of time. Who has time to examine work practices, to create or review safety policies, or to train on safety issues? How many safety committee meetings are canceled because people are “too busy”? How will the job get done if staff is occupied by other unrelated responsibilities? It can be a difficult balancing act for a supervisor/manager, and safety concerns are sometimes forgotten until something goes wrong.

At the same time, in an effort to get the job done we have seen injury claims from workers who have stopped working smart, have disregarded safety risks, and have ignored what their bodies were telling them. These are situations where people literally have to be protected from themselves.

As mentioned in the past, one of the differences between YCPARMIA’s public employers and private industry seems to be accountability for safety. As a general rule, among our members there has been no real consequence for unsafe work practices or resulting injuries. Our employees, managers and workers alike, are measured on whether they get the job done, not whether they get the job done safely. Accidents and injuries, for some of our members, are accepted as the inevitable cost of doing business. Safety is a nice thing that we will give adequate attention to when we have the time.

Through constant communication, workers need to learn that unsafe practices will not be tolerated, and managers need to learn that their actions on safety issues will speak louder than their words. In some of YCPARMIA’s members this is too often a mixed or inconsistent message.

Next Topic: Safety – Dead-end Inspections -- continued