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Why Safety Must Go Beyond Simply Awareness

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White Paper: Why Safety Must
Go Beyond Simply Awareness

Introduction

One of the biggest mistakes an organization can make is to stop safety education for its workers at the awareness/orientation level. Hiring clients and contractors are responsible for ensuring workers are qualified to perform their tasks safely, based on the regulations of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Training requirements are detailed in OSHA publication 2254 *Training Requirements in OSHA Standards*, and other rulemaking bodies.



Three Components of Safety Education

For workers to be able to effectively identify, assess, control, and adapt to crises that can catastrophically affect an organization's bottom line, three components of safety education must be implemented:



Initial Hazard Awareness
*(Also Called Onboarding Training
or Orientation Training)*



**Focused Topical or
Refresher Training**



**Ongoing Professional
Development Activities**

Without training in critical hazard areas, as a refresher to initial awareness material, or as professional development in emerging safety management and technical areas, employees do not have the advanced tools needed to safely complete site- and task-specific work requirements. It is one thing to be aware of a hazard, and another to effectively implement robust assessment, emergency response efforts, corrective actions, reporting, and higher-order problem solving; while achieving regulatory and contractual compliance.

Problem Statement

Without safety training and professional development that follow the receipt of general hazard awareness/orientation training, employees often begin to neglect safe practices in lieu of faster, more efficient methods. Taking a shortcut once with no negative consequences makes it easier to repeat those shortcuts and look for new ones – but safety leaders know it's only a matter of time before those “efficiencies” result in an undesirable outcome. By gaining additional knowledge, workers will become more aware of their weaknesses and strengths and will learn to recognize a hazardous situation when it appears, and be able to respond, evaluate, and implement corrective actions before incidents or injuries occur.



Three Levels of Safety Education

General Hazard Awareness

General hazard awareness, typically conducted during onboarding orientations such as SafeLandUSA, is a common term used to describe the training that most employees need to identify common workplace safety and health hazards. The goal of general hazard awareness/orientation training is to provide employees with a baseline understanding of general safety and health requirements, for them to be able to protect themselves and others on the job. Additional job/task/site specific safety training is almost always needed, depending on the employees' roles and responsibilities.

Safety Training

Safety training refers to an education process in which employees get a chance to develop skills, competency and knowledge for the specific requirements of their job tasks or site location. It is the process of increasing safety expertise and technical skills of an employee. Safety training is generally short time/term focused and for a fixed duration. Training provides a skill and mechanism for what to do with that awareness and is often the function of regulatory requirements such as OSHA's lockout/tagout, permit required confined space, hearing conservation standards, and the like.

Professional Development

Professional development refers to an informative process which helps in understanding the overall growth and improvement of the safety skills and competencies of the employee. It is a process of learning and growth. Professional development is performed with the aim of improving safety technical and theoretical knowledge and enhancing skills to face future organizational safety challenges. Professional development events are generally longer time/term focused.



The following table provides a summary of the main differences among general hazard awareness, safety training, and professional development initiatives. Organizations intent on world-class safety metrics and reduction of incidents, injuries, and catastrophic events that will affect worker's lives and the company's bottom line would do well to incorporate each of these levels.

| | General Hazard Awareness | Safety Training | Professional Development |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Definitions | An initial general course for industry-specific general policies, hazard recognition, and expectations for a safe and healthy work environment. | An education process in which employees get a chance to develop skills, competency and learning as per the post duty requirements and regulatory/contractual obligations. | An informative process which mainly helps in understanding about the overall growth and improvement of the skills of the employee. |
| Employee Learning Lifecycle | A process for providing a consistent level of hazard awareness across an organization or set of organizations. | A process of increasing knowledge and skills of an employee. | A process of learning and growth. |
| Delivery | A one-time presentation or infrequent reminder of hazards in a general work environment for an industry or site. | A short time/term focused and for a fixed duration. | A long time/term focused, which takes place throughout the life of a person. |
| Focus | An industry-oriented process. | A task- and job-oriented process. | A career-oriented process. |
| Goal | Performed to create an awareness of the general hazards that may be encountered in a specific industry. | Performed with the goal of improving knowledge and skills that are needed to perform their existing jobs. | Performed with the goal of improving knowledge and skills to face future challenges. |
| Purpose | Prepares an individual to start work in a specific industry. | Helps individuals learn how to perform his/her present job satisfactorily. | Prepares individuals for future jobs and growth in all aspects. |
| Process | Required process. | Reactive or proactive process. | Proactive process. |
| Training Origin | The result of creating uniformity in baseline knowledge between companies in the same industry. | The result of initiatives, taken by management and is a result of outside motivation. | The result of initiatives, taken by self and is a result of self-motivation. |
| Training levels | Training is general and pertains to everyone. | Training is mainly attended by individuals. | Mainly selected by a manager and individual in collaboration and attended by individuals. |
| Continuous Education | Refers to general hazard awareness to prepare a worker for the industry. | Refers to learning new things and refreshing old ones. | Refers to implementing learned sessions and finding new ones. |
| Scope | Focuses on general hazard awareness; very broad scope. | Focuses on technical skills, and has a narrow scope. | Development focuses on the person. |
| Target areas | Focuses on industry general hazards. | Focuses on the role. | Focuses on the person. |
| Need areas | Revolves around creating normalcy in awareness between all workers. | Revolves around present need. | Revolves around future need. |



Conclusion

Training employees in general hazard awareness through orientation training and the like is a start to the continuous improvement of your safety management and competency structure within an organization. However, to shift the culture, improve safety metrics, achieve regulatory compliance, and influence change, the advancement past general hazard awareness, into focused (in depth) safety training, and professional development is essential. Focused safety training and advanced knowledge of emerging safety technical and theoretical ideas addresses both the needs of workers to work safely, and for the organization to advance its objectives.

Veriforce partners with companies every day to create a safer workforce.

Contact safety@veriforce.com to learn more.

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