

Safety in the Real World- By Lewell E. Troast Jr. Empire Safety Training & Consulting, Inc.

There are many reasons to provide a safe working environment. Workers compensation cost, overtime to provide coverage employee out due to an injury, PESH/OSHA citations, etc. But what is your reason to provide a safe working environment?

Your employees should be protected from long term and short-term health hazards, injuries, and illnesses. A safe working environment will reduce workers compensation cost, overtime, and PESH/OSHA citations.

But the best reason to do it is that it's the "**right thing**" to do. In the "real world" we are faced with budget cuts, personnel shortages, and limited resources for equipment purchases. Safety isn't an item that should be placed away in the closet, and only opened when the PESH/OSHA Compliance Officer knocks on your door.

Where do you start? The first thing that you need to do is take an honest assessment of your work environment. This can be done internally or by an outside firm. When we work in the same environment on a daily basis, we often become desensitized to certain hazards that may be present. By stopping and taking a fresh look at the work environment, we can help to identify items that need attention. What to look for?

- Fall Hazards - Any unprotected openings
- Electrical Hazards - Any exposed wiring, broken outlets, frayed extension cords, outlets that need ground fault circuit interrupter protection
- Fire Protection Equipment inspected and serviceable
- Permit Required Confined Space signs posted on all Permit Required Confined Spaces
- Right to Know and OSHA Health & Safety Posters in place
- First aid kits available and stocked.
- Respirators stored properly, maintained and cleaned
- Material Safety Data Sheets available for chemicals on site
- Locks/tags and lockout/tagout devices available for employee use.
- Emergency eyewash units available where corrosives are used

This is just a short list of items that should be looked at. Once identified, corrective action needs to be taken. Nothing is worse for morale than identified safety concerns that are never resolved. Inform employees of the status of safety improvements to improve communications. We know in the 'real world' things don't happen overnight. Most of the best ideas for solutions come from employees. There are new safety products being developed on a daily basis. If you need a safety solution ask other operators/facilities or use your association. Someone somewhere has probably already found a solution to your problem.

What next? You need to take a look at your written safety programs. Depending on your facility you may need one or all of the written PESH/OSHA required safety programs listed below that are common to most facilities.

- Hazard Communication
- Lockout/Tagout - To include lockout/tagout procedures for all equipment
- Confined Space Program and Confined Space Survey with a hazard assessment
- Personal Protective Equipment Survey -This identifies each job task and the appropriate personal protective equipment required to perform that function.
- Hearing Conservation Program and Noise Survey
- Emergency Evacuation
- Emergency Preparedness Plan
- Respiratory- If respirators are required to be worn

What about training? I will list some of the training that is required by PESH/OSHA. Your facility and your scope of work will determine the exact training required. You should also look at your accident reports to determine where your injuries are occurring so that you can select training topics that are relevant.

- Hazard Communication
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Confined Space Entry (If employees are entering Permit Required Confined Spaces)

- Hearing Conservation
- Lockout/Tagout and electrical safety
- Fire Extinguisher Use
- First Responder Awareness - Additional training if Chemical Protective Suits are worn
- Heavy Equipment
- Trenching Awareness - Trenching Competent Person is trenching work is performed
- Fall Protection

Safety in the "real world" requires that we have written safety programs, conduct mandated training, and perform safety audits. But PESH/OSHA regulations are minimum guidelines. We can also go above the minimum that is required. Training should be site specific and not a "canned program". Training should help to improve your present safety program, and further identify and reduce injuries. Training is difficult for many municipalities due to time constraints, work coverage, etc. One option that many municipalities choose is to perform training on a yearly basis covering all required safety topics. Safety in the "real world" it's not all about the regulations, its about employees being able to retire healthy, not becoming an injury/illness statistic.

About the Author:

Lew Troast has over 20 years experience in the Safety field. He is a former NYS Fire Instructor and belongs to the Onondaga County Hazardous Materials Response Team, and is a Volunteer Firefighter with the Minoa Fire Department. Previously, he was a Safety Supervisor for the Syracuse, N.Y. Inland Fisher Guide General Motors Plant. He owns and operates Empire Safety Training & Consulting, Inc. along with his two partners. Empire Safety Training & Consulting, Inc. provides written safety programs and training needs to municipal and industrial clients across NYS. Empire Safety Training & Consulting, Inc. is a member of the New York Rural Water Association.