

Preventing Off-Work Injuries

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Employers can keep productivity and profits high through off-work safety initiatives



Manufacturers nationwide have implemented numerous policies and procedures to prevent workplace injuries. However, they have become so focused on these safety practices, being OSHA complaint and observing OSHA's recordkeeping procedures that safety's big picture is no longer in focus.

There are about six times as many days lost from work due to off-the-job injuries when compared to on-the-job injuries. According to the National Safety Council (NSC), statistics show that for each on-the-job death due to unintentional injuries there are about 12 off-the-job accidental deaths.

Less than four percent of accidental deaths occur in the workplace. The remaining fatalities result from accidents while driving, in the home or at public places. While the number of workplace accidents and vehicular deaths continue to decline due to recent safety campaigns and initiatives, accidental deaths in the home or in public places are on the rise.

Employers must deal with the same disruptions to production and work schedules whether injuries occur at work or away from work. So why not pay attention to the other 96 percent of injuries or deaths that occur outside the workplace? Consider the financial consequences when a valued employee is in the hospital for three days, three weeks or three months because he didn't buckle his seat belt and was seriously injured in a car accident. The enormous cost to the employer can no longer be ignored.

Off-the-job events or catastrophes that lead to employee injuries or fatalities are vastly different from OSHA-recordable types of injuries or illnesses, which tend to be less severe. By not taking any action that encourages safety outside the workplace, employees expose themselves to very severe off-work accidents that lead to loss of life and/or significant property damage.

In this day and age, a manufacturer's public image may also be tarnished if employees behave in unsafe or reckless ways, causing injuries not only to themselves, but to innocent bystanders. Public opinion of the company can quickly shift, damaging the company's long-established reputation, and encouraging its customers and shareholders to start questioning its business culture.

Changing mindsets

Employers need to present employees with opportunities that help change their perceptions from “I have to observe these safety practices” to “I want to observe these safety practices.”

Here are a few suggestions:

- **Walk the talk:** Rank around-the-clock employee safety among your company’s top values. Senior executives and managers must demonstrate safety, both on and off the job, voicing their experiences and ideas to staff on a routine basis.
- **Make it official:** Create a policy, stating that your company values the health and well being of employees on a 24/7 basis. Post the policy in public work areas, such as in the employee break room.
- **Solicit feedback:** Working in a silo may create employee resistance or result in a mismatch between the employer’s goal and employee needs. Invite employee suggestions and comments as to how to educate the workforce about safety tips and practices. Develop a focus group or committee or simply place a suggestion box in common work areas.
- **Focus on safety awareness.** Offer safety training sessions either online or via traditional workshops. At the very least, they will point employees in the right direction, encouraging them to introspectively think about what would happen to their family if they were injured on or off the job. There are many organizations that provide free resources, such as The National Safety Council, which offers hundreds of online training programs that employees can complete at their own pace, on their own time. (www.nsc.org/products_training/Training/Pages/OnlineTraining.aspx). FMA members have free access to online safety training from safety.blr, which includes training on off-the-job as well as on-the-job safety issues. (<http://www.fmanet.org/safety>). Likewise, FDR Safety has also trained over 400,000 people on a variety of safety topics. (www.fdrsafety.com).
- **Reward or recognize employees** who complete an online course or attend a workshop. Throw a pizza party during lunch or after work, asking them to share their ideas or new safety practices they now observe or introduced to family members.
- **Expand this effort to the community.** Share your company’s good deeds and safety ideas with other local organizations. Position your business as a good corporate citizen that cares about the welfare of the people in its community.

If you’re still not convinced, examine your health care claims and insurance premiums. You’ll quickly discover the financial and societal impact of encouraging people to stay safe – both to you as an employer and to the community in which you serve.

Safety Education Pays



Over recent decades, there have been numerous examples of how off work employee injuries impact an employer's productivity. Consider a restaurant cook who injures his hand while preparing dinner at home or a truck driver who slides off an icy road on the way to the store. For each on-the-job injury involving lost work time, there are roughly three off-the-job injuries.

This problem is nothing new. More than 40 years ago, M.J. Caserio, a vice president at

General Motors and general manager of its AC spark plug division authored an article, "Making Off-the-Job Safety Pay – With Interest" that was published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

The article begins:

"Off-the-job safety is an area of the industry's total safety effort that offers more opportunities – and more challenges – than almost any other. In 1965, General Motors had 10 on-the-job fatalities. Over the same period, 241 of our people died as the result of off-the-job accidents...."

Fred Rine, CEO and Founder of FDR Safety has personally conducted safety awareness training for tens of thousands of employees using the principles discussed in this paper. Fred notes, "When you have an employee tell you that they never buckled up, but will do so from now on, they got the message. Recently, I had a supervisor tell me that he thought about the session when preparing to do work on his house. He went out and bought a new ladder to improve his safety – and protect his family's well-being in the process. Safety 24-7 moves people to wanting to be safe."

However, many employers are frozen in a specific mindset, much like a horse trotting down a street in New York City, pulling a carriage, wearing blinders on each side. Manufacturers consistently push to eliminate all workplace incidents or injuries. But when asked what efforts they're making outside the workplace to achieve the same results, they look at you with blank stares.

Employers in all industries need to support this safety effort. How many could actually stay in business if they only paid attention to 4% of their product defects while ignoring the other 96%?



Michael Taubitz is a member of the Fabricators & Manufacturers Association (FMA) Safety Council, which supports initiatives to help the organization's members reduce risk in the workplace, including safety awards and an annual safety conference. Based in Rockford, Ill., the FMA is a professional organization with more than 2,300 members working together to improve the metal forming and fabricating industry. Founded in 1970, FMA brings metal fabricators and fabricating equipment manufacturers together through technology councils, educational programs, networking events, industry trade publications including The FABRICATOR®, and the FABTECH® trade show. FMA also has a technology affiliate, the Tube & Pipe Association, International (TPA), which focuses on the unique needs of companies engaged in tube and pipe producing and fabricating. To learn more about member services, industry certification and educational programs log on to www.fmanet.org.

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