

## Safety: Keeping Awareness Alive

How can you keep your people thinking about safety? Sit everyone down, hand out copies of a long list of recent safety infractions, and go through your long list of safety do's and don'ts. Make sure to include all of your pet peeves, and go through them one by one (at the top of my list is seeing two people in a truck moving in reverse without a spotter behind the truck).

- Or, rather than droning on and on
- And risking losing everyone's attention,
- Consider this:
- A study at the University of Minnesota
- Showed that with bullet point lists
- People retain the first and second points,
- And maybe the last one,
- But little or nothing else,
- And adult learners retain even less from long lists.

However, people do remember stories. Storytelling is as natural as breathing to

most people. A story can be the vehicle that carries the safety message and commits it to memory. People do remember the point when it is told in the context of a story.

Get your people talking about safety. We set aside a portion of our regular company meetings for verbal near-miss reporting. Reports written by the shy and read aloud by others can work too. A near-miss is a safety related incident where things nearly went wrong; in some cases things nearly went terribly wrong - not an actual accident. Near-miss reporting is an opportunity to expand the experience of all employees and uncover weaknesses in safety training prior to an actual accident. It is a preventative measure, not an after-the-fact recognition.

Under no circumstances should this be a time to report actual accidents. Actual accidents need to be reported based on your company policy. Obviously management retribution for near-miss reporting in this context will have a cooling effect on this program. A safe environment for the employees to report their stories needs to be firmly outlined.

Employee interest in implementing this plan can be slow at first but stick with it, it really works. The format is simple (please focus really hard four short bullet points ahead):

- What happened?
- What did you do?
- What would you do different next time?



- Ask the rest of the group for comments.
- Start with a general call for near miss stories from the past. Then shorten the time frame to the the last safety meeting. As part of a full safety program, near-miss reporting will create a portion of the program that lives and breathes on its own, rather than strictly using management driven safety initiatives.

A good example: "Last week we were removing a tree, and we had the entire area marked off with signs and cones, when a bike rider rode through the work zone and almost got hurt. So we moved the trucks to make it physically impossible for another bike rider to ride through. Next time we will make it impossible for a bike to get through and be more vigilant."

A poor example - "Yesterday we dented the back of the truck with the loader and did not get caught, so I'm telling you now because there is no retribution from management for stories told in this safe environment." Sounds like an unreported accident not a near-miss.

Once the stories are told or time runs out, employees then vote via applause for the best story. The company should offer a prize of some sort. My wife is no sports fan, but her favorite sports quote is from Randy Moss, the former Minnesota Vikings football player. After fake mooning the Green Bay fans and paying the resulting \$10,000 fine, he said "I'm rich; I don't write checks for ten grand. I pay straight cash homey" How should the best story be rewarded? Straight cash homey.

*(Editor's Note: Affiliate members are encouraged to supply articles from a question they have been asked by a Superintendent. Please send articles to scott@mgcsa.org.)*

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