



Safety 101

*How to Establish and Run
A Workplace Safety Program*

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Editorial and Production Staff

Vice President, Environmental, Health & Safety Markets:	Ed Keating
Founder:	Robert L. Brady, JD
Managing Editor:	David L. Galt
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Manager, Content Management Services:	Isabelle B. Smith
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Questions or comments about this publication?

Contact:

BLR—Business & Legal Resources
100 Winners Circle, Suite 300
P.O. Box 41503
Nashville, TN 37204-1503
www.blr.com

Table of Contents

Chapter 1.....	1
What makes a great safety professional?	1
Special challenges if safety is an added responsibility	1
What is your role as a safety manager?.....	2
How this book will help	2
Next steps	3
Chapter 2.....	5
Set the stage for safety success	5
Be a cheerleader and a business advocate for safety.....	5
Insist on top management support and participation	6
Clarify responsibilities: Yours, management's, employees'	6
Encourage employee involvement	6
Create a safety culture	7
Next steps	7
Chapter 3.....	9
Get familiar with OSHA	9
What is OSHA?	9
What about state safety regulations?.....	9
Rights and responsibilities under OSHA.....	10
OSHA's guidelines for safety programs.....	11
OSHA's posting, recordkeeping, and notification requirements	12
OSHA inspections, citations, penalties.....	13
Assistance from OSHA	13
OSHA partnership programs.....	14
OSHA offices	16
Next steps	16
Chapter 4.....	17
Meet your legal obligations	17
Safety law	17
OSH Act and regulations.....	17
Requesting variances from OSHA regulations	18
Other guidelines, rules, and laws	18
Other legal challenges related to safety	20
Next steps	21
Chapter 5.....	23
Identify your workplace's hazards	23

Quick tips on hazard identification	23
Use a variety of hazard indicators	24
Perform a physical worksite analysis	24
Perform job-by-job analysis	25
Don't forget these employment issues	28
Next steps	29
Chapter 6.....	31
Look for these specific hazards.....	31
Emergencies	33
Physical plant.....	39
Hazardous materials.....	47
Process safety management of highly hazardous chemicals	49
Hazardous waste operations and emergency response	50
Occupational exposure to hazardous chemicals in laboratories	51
PPE.....	52
Hazardous processes/activities	54
Health issues	61
Safety issues for specific types of workplaces.....	63
OSHA's special industries rules	65
Next steps	65
Chapter 7.....	67
Eliminate or control hazards	67
Preferred solution: Eliminate the hazard	67
Protect with PPE	68
Deal with behavioral hazards.....	68
Mandate start-up and daily inspections	68
Recognize the role of maintenance in hazard control	69
Develop policies and procedures.....	69
Consider a safety handbook	70
Weigh the benefits of an on-site medical facility	72
Next steps	72
Chapter 8.....	73
Train all employees, supervisors, and managers	73
Cope with training challenges.....	73
Conduct orientation training.....	75
Implement OSHA's HazCom	77
Use OSHA's Seven-Step Voluntary Training Guidelines.....	84
Next steps	92
Chapter 9.....	93
Motivate safe behavior.....	93
How employees can take part in safety	93

Understand why accidents happen	93
It's all about motivation.....	94
Discipline for safety infractions.....	95
Install a safety committee.....	95
Next steps	99
Chapter 10.....	101
Manage ongoing safety responsibilities.....	101
Set safety goals, evaluate, and update.....	101
Perform safety audits.....	102
Manage recordkeeping requirements	103
Handle an OSHA inspection.....	108
Investigate accidents	115
Administer workers' compensation	118
Consider light-duty programs.....	120
Next steps	122
Appendix A	123
Safety and health resources on the Internet	123
Appendix B.....	125
State safety programs	125
Appendix C	137
Model safety programs	137
Model Safety Program #1	137
Model Safety Program #2	140
Model Safety Program #3	141
Appendix D	145
Model safety policies.....	145
Safety policies	145
PPE	151
Accident-reporting policies.....	157
Emergency policies	164
Fire prevention policies	167
Workers' compensation policies.....	175
Hazard communication policies and programs	184
Ergonomics policy	191
Return-to-work policies.....	193
Appendix E.....	195
Master training guide for 29 CFR	195
Appendix F	209
Model safety checklists and training guides	209
Subpart D—Walking and working surfaces.....	213

Subpart E—Exit routes, emergency action plans, and fire prevention plans	217
Subpart F—Powered platforms, manlifts, and vehicle-mounted work platforms	221
Subpart G—Occupational health and environmental control	226
Subpart H—Hazardous materials.....	229
Subpart I—PPE	246
Subpart J—General environmental controls	253
Subpart K—Medical and first aid	262
Subpart L—Fire protection	263
Subpart M—Compressed gas and compressed air equipment	267
Subpart N—Material handling and storage	267
Subpart O—Machinery and machine guarding	273
Subpart P—Hand and portable powered tools and other handheld equipment	275
Subpart Q—Welding, cutting, and brazing	276
Subpart R—Special industries	278
Subpart S—Electrical	286
Subpart T—Commercial diving operations	289
Subpart Z—Toxic and hazardous substances	290

What makes a great safety professional?

Congratulations! You're now in charge of safety. Whether safety is your full-time job or an additional responsibility, you may feel overwhelmed and may not know where to start. However, much about safety management is training and motivating employees—expertise that you may already have.

In this book, we'll look at the key elements of successful safety programs and show you how to implement them in your organization. We'll cover:

- The role of the safety manager
- Setting the stage for safety success
- How to identify hazards and neutralize their dangers
- How to write policies and a safety handbook
- How to assess training needs and develop and deliver training
- How to motivate employees toward safe behavior
- How to perform the many other aspects of safety management, like audits, inspections, investigations, and so on

Special challenges if safety is an added responsibility

It's always tricky to do a tough job like safety management as a part-time responsibility. You may have to devote some attention to drawing boundaries and setting policies that help you to keep control of your time. Here are some suggestions.

- **Spread the load.** When safety is a secondary responsibility, you must guard against anyone thinking you can do a full-time job of it. You need to work hard to clarify responsibilities, and to make sure that manager and department heads do their share of the safety work
- **Rely on your safety committee.** Your committee can do much to manage the safety program. Take advantage of the committee. Make sure it meets regularly and often. Have the other members involved directly in safety management. For example, have each member agree to take a turn doing the monthly audits—don't you try to do every audit every month. Members can also be involved in training, accident investigations, and so on.
- **Bring others into safety business.** Perhaps the managers will each take a turn walking through another manager's department. Develop detailed policies and procedures. Make sure that everyone knows what their responsibilities are.

- **Use outside resources.** Perhaps you will purchase training videos, or hire outside consultants for some safety tasks. Maybe local fire and police can help with disaster preparations or emergency training.

What is your role as a safety manager?

Of course, every worksite is different, with different hazards and different challenges. But most safety managers are involved with the following:

Be an advocate for safety

- Get management backing and participation
- Develop general safety policies
- Clarify responsibilities
- Create a safety focus

Identify and control hazards

- Assess workplace hazards
- Take steps to eliminate them

Develop and deliver safety training

- Orient new employees
- Provide new and review training
- Train for new equipment and new processes

Motivate safe behavior

- Discipline when necessary

Perform special safety responsibilities

- Support the safety committee
- Perform accident reporting and investigation
- Manage workers' compensation

How this book will help

We'll give you guidelines for meeting all these responsibilities and point you to sources for additional materials. Since every workplace is different, however, you'll need to pick and choose which elements are most important for you and your work situation.

To get started, here's what we recommend:

1. Skim through this book to get an idea of what safety management is all about.
2. Familiarize yourself with your organization's current safety status:
 - Review policies on safety, and also any other safety materials such as a safety handbook.
 - Review safety program activities such as training, incentive programs, etc.
 - Review the safety history as found in accident reports, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 300 logs, and workers' compensation claims.

- Identify safety equipment used, such as fire protection, eyewash, and personal protective equipment.
 - Check schedules for training, audits, committees, etc.
 - Talk to key managers about safety issues in their departments.
3. Work your way through this book, conducting a hazard identification/hazard control program, devising a training schedule, and setting up ongoing safety program elements.
 4. Chart out how you will approach managing your safety program and improving it. Which areas need attention (training, compliance, motivation), how badly do they need it, and when do they need it?
 5. Create a safety plan and set goals for your new program.

Next steps

The next chapter discusses some critical steps that you must take before you start the detailed work of identifying and controlling hazards and developing your safety program.

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Set the stage for safety success

To run an effective safety program, you need to be an enthusiastic booster of safety. But enthusiasm isn't enough to win over management—you need to make the business case for safety as well.

Be a cheerleader and a business advocate for safety

Management will readily agree that safety is important, and they know that they have a moral obligation to maintain a safe workplace. But sometimes it's hard to get that concern translated into a budget for safety products, to get people released for safety training, and to get time allocated for safety committee meetings, inspections, and investigations.

Bottom line

While you want to be an enthusiastic cheerleader, remember that management tends to be influenced most by impact to the bottom line. So enthusiasm and moral arguments aren't enough. You need to be able to justify safety program elements as cost-saving and productivity enhancing. Here's help for explaining to your management how safety is good for its own sake, and for productivity and profit.

The most important factor is a simple one: An unsafe workplace is unproductive and unprofitable.

Safety a necessity

Here are some more specific reasons for safety programs.

- **Injuries and illnesses drop productivity dramatically.** Safety problems—accidents, injuries, illnesses—can shut down production lines for repairs or for investigations. Further, lost-time accidents mean the loss of skilled workers—substitutes just can't keep productivity up.
- **Fines and sanctions for noncompliance with safety rules can be stiff.** Organizations have a legal obligation to keep employees safe. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires organizations to provide a safe workplace.
- **In spite of workers' compensation laws, lawsuits lurk.** Even more expensive and time-consuming than OSHA sanctions are lawsuits that are likely when there's even a hint of negligence. And don't think juries are going to side with you when an injured employee takes the stand.
- **Morale suffers when safety suffers.** "I told them about the hazard, but they just don't care." That attitude isn't going to make for eager, productive workers.

- **When morale suffers, retention suffers.** When employees don't feel secure where they work, and don't think that management cares about their safety, they are much more likely to look for other work. That's another expensive problem—lost productivity while you hire and train new workers—if you can find them.

Yes, there is a modest investment for safety programs, but the return on that investment can be dramatic.

Insist on top management support and participation

As with most any organizational project, the first step is to gain management support. And experienced safety people know that management can't just be supportive—they have to show it. They have to let everyone in the organization know that safety comes before productivity. If top management won't support that premise, then you'll never get anyone else to support it.

Support includes resources, access, and participation.

- **Resources for safety.** This means reasonable budget allocations for safety training materials, safety signs, posters, lockout equipment, etc. It also means commitment to time for investigations, safety meetings, and so on.
- **Access to the top for safety.** In addition, safety personnel need to have access to upper management so that safety concerns can be aired at high levels in the structure.
- **Frequent and enthusiastic participation.** Management must be present at safety awards, at training, and must take an active role.

OSHA says “In an effective program, management regards worker safety and health as a fundamental value of the organization and applies its commitment to safety and health protection with as much vigor to other organizational goals.”

Clarify responsibilities: Yours, management's, employees'

One problem that can easily sidetrack the best safety efforts is lack of clarity about responsibility. Lay out the safety responsibilities for the following groups:

- Top management
- Safety officer
- Safety committee members
- Managers and supervisors
- Employees with special responsibilities such as first aid, firefighting, or emergency shutdown
- All employees

In each case, try to be specific. Spell out who performs each major safety task and how and where they get the resources to accomplish it.

Encourage employee involvement

Most experts believe that for a safety program to work, employees must be involved. There are two important aspects to this.

- **Build in employee involvement.** When planning how to structure and operate your safety program, and when making decisions that affect employee safety and health, build in employee participation every step of the way.
- **Insist that participating employees be supported.** Managers and supervisors must be truly supportive. They do this actively by encouraging participation, but also by their attitudes. For example, they can't act annoyed when an employee needs time off to attend a safety meeting. You can't have employees thinking, "Being on this safety committee is going to hurt my career chances."

Create a safety culture

It's not enough to have a policy and a program. Safety managers need to think in terms of developing a safety culture—a workplace in which safety is part of the landscape, a routine presence in every employee's work habits. Here are some of the things that will help:

- **Publicize your commitment.** Make sure safety is mentioned at all employee meetings, gatherings, training sessions, etc.
- **Involve employees.** As mentioned above, the more employees feel they have had a hand in creating the program, the more committed they will be to carrying it out.
- **Have an active safety committee.** Safety committees are discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.
- **Develop a complaint system.** Make sure employees know where to go, and make sure to investigate, take action, and get back to the employee.

Next steps

Now that you have a feel for your safety role, it's time to become familiar with OSHA, the federal agency that governs safety regulation and enforces safety rules.