Safe Times

TRISTAR Loss Control | Volume 6 | Issue No. 2 | April 2007 | Loss Control Newsletter

SAFETY INSPECTIONS - WHAT DO THEY TELL YOU?

By Miles Katayama, CSP, Loss Control Manager, San Diego Office

How do employers know whether or not their accident prevention programs are effective? Are there indicators other than the number of accidents/incidents or the dollars spent on medical treatment and compensation? One form of feedback is to conduct a periodic safety inspection. Other terms for this might be "safety audit" or "safety survey".

Although monitoring frequency and costs of accidents is important, it is a reactive way to address accident prevention. A smart employer does not wait for an accident to occur before taking action to improve an accident prevention program. From a production standpoint, this is like waiting for the marketplace to change before deciding to alter or replace a product.

This is similar to what has happened to the automobile industry. American automobile manufacturers seem obsessed with offering bigger trucks and SUVs despite the state of the economy. Even today, with the spotlight on gas prices, General Motors and Ford still have television commercials touting large vehicles with large engines instead of marketing competitive hybrid vehicles. Slow reaction to the marketplace by American car companies may have helped Toyota to increase its sales.

A safety inspection should be considered a management tool that provides both positive and negative feedback. It is a way to gather information that can help management make decisions and changes before accidents become a problem. As an added benefit, safety inspections often uncover methods of improving production and even morale.

Safety inspections can be conducted by anyone with adequate training. Normally, it is done by supervisors or safety committee members. Often teams of two or three people are designated to inspect a certain area of the operations. By breaking down this task into teams and departments/areas, the time involved can be kept to a reasonable amount.

It might also be helpful if the teams are rotated to foster the sharing of knowledge. In addition, the rotating of departments/areas will help bring fresh viewpoints and different perspectives to areas that are inspected.

For the smaller employer, the inspection may be conducted by a manager with a "rotating" employee. This allows more people to get involved with the accident prevention program. Employee participation is essential for long term success and establishing a "safety culture".

It is important to remember that most people do not know what to look for during a safety inspection. This means that a certain amount of training must be conducted.

Also, if a checklist is used, some instruction on how to use the form is essential. Let's avoid the scenario where an employee is given a checklist and told to see if an area is safe. Twenty minutes later the employee returns the form with everything checked in the "OK" column. Most people need to be taught what is "OK" and "Not OK".

When deciding what to include on a checklist, consider starting out with a list of 10 to 20 items that relate to past incidents/accidents or common exposures. Keep in mind that most accidents are caused by people and not defective equipment. Therefore, checklists should include employee actions as well. We must observe and evaluate how safely employees do their jobs.

(Please see back page)

IN THIS ISSUE:

SPACE HEATER SAFETY

(Part 2 of 2)

By Miles Katayama, CSP
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According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), home heating equipment accounts for 60% of the 36,000 heating-related fires each year. A 2003 study by the CPSC showed that portable heaters are the major cause of deaths in fires caused by home heating equipment. It is estimated that about 300 people die in fires associated with the use of space heaters each year. In addition to burns and fire, other hazards include indoor air pollution and carbon monoxide poisoning.

General Suggestions from the CPSC for All Space Heaters

- Select a space heater that is guarded at the flame area or heating element.
- Look for one that has been tested and certified by a nationally recognized testing laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL).
- Try to match the heating capacity of the heater to the size of the room it will be used in. The wrong size heater could produce extra pollutants and may not use energy efficiently.
- Read and follow the manufacturer's operating instructions. Be sure other people using the heater receive instructions for proper use.

(Please see back page)

Safety Inspections: What Do They Tell You?

(continued)

If an organization has had incidents/accidents involving eye injuries or back strains, the checklists should include: 1) employees are wearing proper eye protection in designated areas, and 2) employees are using proper lifting techniques/devices.

Other items that may be added to the checklist are those required by the Fire Department, Cal/OSHA or other agencies. It may be necessary to prioritize to keep the list manageable.

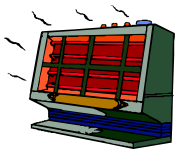
As a "rule of thumb" inspections should be conducted at least monthly. Less often is okay, if the exposures are minimal. Conversely, safety items such as machine guarding or personal protective equipment may need to be checked daily.

Once an inspection has been conducted, it is imperative that there is proper follow-up by management. Very little is accomplished by identifying problems and not correcting them. In fact, the lack of corrections may create an apathetic safety culture.

An employer must be prepared to accept the fact that unsafe behaviors of employees may be caused by poor policies, supervision or training. For example, it is common to find that employees don't wear safety glasses because supervisors don't enforce the rules regarding eye protection. Sometimes there is no policy to enforce!

If inspections continually indicate a problem with equipment/facilities being in disrepair, then management must consider replacing these items. If the same items appear on the inspection list each month, then increasing maintenance staff may be indicated. In some cases using an outside contractor is the best solution.

Failure to conduct regular safety inspections of the workplace is similar to ignoring preventive maintenance on vehicles. Like the vehicle that is not maintained, the unchecked safety program may be headed for a major breakdown. The result may be more accidents and injuries. From a cost standpoint, this usually means more dollars spent in the long-run. ★



Space Heater Safety

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- Children and pets should be kept away from space heaters.
- Keep doors open to the rest of the house when using a non-vented fuel-burning space heater. Even vented heaters need ventilation for proper combustion.
- Space heaters should not be left on when you go to sleep or leave the area.
- Do not use or store flammable liquids around a space heater.
- Only electric or vented fuel-fired heaters should be used in mobile homes.
- Allow at least three feet between the space heater and flammable materials such as bedding, drapes, etc.
- Do not use space heaters to dry clothes or shoes.
- Be aware of objects stored above the space heater that could fall on it.
- Space heaters should be placed on level, hard surfaces and not on rugs or carpet.

Although we tend to think of space heaters being used at home, remember that many are used in the workplace. If space heaters are to be allowed at work, consider setting some minimum standards and require management inspection and approval. ★

Loss Control Consultation Services

TRISTAR's Loss Control Department can provide an experienced consultant to assist with your Injury and Illness Prevention Programs. Services include detailed claims analysis reports, program evaluations, site inspections, and education/training on various safety-related topics.

Consultation services are available on a contract or hourly basis. Contact Miles Katayama at (858) 715-4112, Jim Echavarri at (562) 506-0341 or your TRISTAR Sales Representative. ★

Education and Training Calendar

AIHA
www.aiha.org/road.htm • (703) 849-88888
Fundamentals of Industrial Hygiene
April 16-19 — San Francisco, CA

American Safety Training
www.trainosha.com • (800) 206-6705
California OSHA
April 2-5 — Anaheim, CA

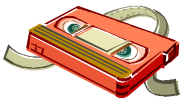
American Trainco
www.AmericanTrainco.com • (877) 978-7246
Basic Electricity for the Non-Electrician
April 2-3 — Oakland, CA
April 16-17 — San Diego, CA
April 23-24 — Burbank, CA
April 30-May 1 — Fresno, CA
May 14-15 — Orange, CA
June 25-26 — Sacramento, CA

Environmental Resource Center
www.ercweb.com • (800) 537-2372
Hazardous Waste Management in California
June 12-13 — Irvine, CA

DOT and RCRA Annual Update and Refresher
April 4 — Anaheim, CA

Safestart
www.safestart-safetrack.com/workshops
Advanced Safety Awareness
April 3-4 — Denver, CO
April 25-26 — Dallas, TX
May 15-16 — Houston, TX
June 6-7 — Los Angeles, CA

TRISTAR's Loss Control Video Library



As a service to TRISTAR's clients, the Loss Control department provides safety and health videos that can be rented free of charge. These videos can be used for staff training and education or to enhance safety committee meetings.

Contact Jim Echavarri at (562) 506-0341 or Miles Katayama at (858) 715-4112 for a Video Library Catalog. Let us know if there is a safety topic you did not find in the catalog. ★

TRISTAR Risk Management

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