Planning & Tracking Risk Reduction to Completion
Creating Effective Corrective Action Plans
By James A. Burk & Janet A. Hendry

Follow-up on identified safety issues is an important part of risk reduction; if gaps in safety are identified, it is critical that they are effectively closed. This requires documented corrective action plans. A facility can use a basic spreadsheet tool to document meaningful and sustainable management action plans to address observed gaps. The plans must describe the specific actions to be taken, identify responsible individuals and resources needed, and estimate each corrective action completion date. The corrective actions are then tracked to closure.

Define Documented Plan
For effective corrective actions plans, the documented plan must be well defined; action plans should be as concise as possible but provide the necessary information and be measurable. This can often be conveyed as follows:

- **First sentence/group of sentences**: Describe how the scope of the gap will be fully identified. Remember, an identified gap may represent one of many similar gaps in the process. Gaps can also be found through audits/assessments based on sampling and do not identify the full extent of the issue.

- **Second sentence/group of sentences**: Describe how the fully identified issue will be closed/corrected.

- **Third sentence/group of sentences**: Explain what process (by name) will be used to ensure that the identified issue does not return. It is helpful to use an existing plant process such as preventive maintenance scheduling software, Outlook calendar and task schedulers, task matrices, training spreadsheets, local area inspection processes, control charting of assessment results and recurring effectiveness assessments. Continually layering on additional monitoring processes can affect long-term sustainability of the corrective action.

- **Fourth sentence/group of sentences**:
  - “We will fix what was found in the assessment” (often audits/assessment identified gaps are only a sample and do not identify the extent of the issue).
  - “We will develop a plan to fix the issue” (the action plan cannot be to make a plan; completion of the corrective action must be measurable).

Responsible Individual
Designate (by name and title) an individual who will be responsible for each action item in the tracking sheet. This does not mean that this person has to personally complete each item with his/her name on it, but s/he will be held accountable to leadership to ensure that it is completed and that the gap is closed.

Target Completion
Finally, identify a target completion date. Simply creating a target date provides the opportunity to routinely update leadership on progress and address barriers that might delay or prevent full implementation of the plan. Carefully consider resources and timing when choosing a reasonable completion date. Use a risk scoring and ranking method to prioritize any safety action plans. Add multiple levels of control when hazard elimination or substitution cannot immediately reduce the gap. Track each action plan item to completion. If the original target completion date cannot be met, reassess the resources needed, identify any barriers to completion and adjust the controls in place accordingly.

Creating documented and well-constructed corrective action plans is a critical step in implementing effective controls and sustainable risk reduction.

James A. Burk, CSP, MSOH, CET, CPEA, is corporate EHS leader, senior EHS assessor at Owen Corning, and has 28 years’ experience in OSH. Burk’s experience includes layered safety auditing, safety systems control through leading indicators, and OSH talent development and strengthening the global OSH community. He is a professional member of ASSE’s Greater Detroit Chapter and International Practice Specialty.

Janet A. Hendry, CSP, CET, CPEA, is corporate EHS leader, senior EHS assessor at Owens Corning, where she participates in strategy setting, training and tool development to ensure global success. She is a professional member of ASSE’s Central Ohio Chapter and a member of the Society’s International and Management practice specialties and the Women in Safety Engineering Common Interest Group.