Managers look for simplified ways to promote safe work practices while maintaining production levels. Too often, current safety programs that begin with great intentions turn into a paper-tracking nightmare, or the documentation becomes the ends to the means rather than having a positive impact on employee performance.

To address front-line supervisors’ requirements to ensure that a product or service is delivered on time and that their employees do their assigned tasks in a safe and productive manner, there is a simplified way to integrate safety into production that will keep production numbers up and injury numbers and costs down.

What is Performance Safety?

Performance safety refocuses attention back to the basic fundamentals. It is defined as an ongoing review of processes, procedures and individual/team practices through three basic methods: workplace examinations, observation and task analysis. It provides a proactive, continuous improvement environment to encourage safe production at all levels.

Performance safety recognizes individual and team performance in proactive (not reactive) injury prevention techniques that will totally prevent or at least reduce exposures to hazards. It allows employees at every level to achieve optimum performance by:

• recognizing and correcting any unsafe condition or practice, individually and as a team;
• identifying/implementing more efficient, safer ways to perform a task;
• improving/streamlining processes to adjust for newly identified hazards;
• modifying/enhancing safe operating procedures to ensure consistent and repeated safe instruction and performance of the task(s).

Performance safety involves all aspects of a person’s and company’s performance, so defining an unsafe condition/act is based on performance issues rather than through the traditional means of something being unsafe vs. someone being unsafe. As a result, these definitions are used to reevaluate root causes of exposures to hazards.

• An unsafe act is an action taken by an individual who has both knowledge and control of an existing unsafe condition or action but chooses to perform the action or to ignore the condition.
• These definitions account for behaviors, corporate culture, and expectations or, as stated in the performance safety terms, address employee practices, written procedures, and the overall processes currently in place at the site.
• An employee who has not been trained properly may not know how to do the task properly, resulting in an unsafe condition. S/he does not choose to do it with risk, so an unsafe action is not performed. An employee who knows how to perform the task but circumstances take the control away would also be an unsafe condition.
• For example, while welding, an employee must bend at the waist to reach the work area. No mechanism is available to allow him/her to reach it from a different angle. As a result, the employee experiences back pain while performing his/her duties. S/he had no control over the location of the work and was unable to modify the duty to protect his/her back. This is an unsafe condition.
• An employee knows how to properly perform a task and has been trained specifically in this task but insists on modifying the procedure to “save time.” S/he has full control in the decision to perform the task and has all the appropriate tools and equipment to complete the task safely. An example is choosing not to wear leathers to weld and, as a result, the worker’s clothing catches fire. This is clearly an unsafe act. The process is clear, the procedure is clear, and the practice (behavior) is at-risk.
• Performance safety, then, takes into account the practices (employee choices), the procedures (identified way the task should be performed, if identified correctly) and the overall process (employee training, employee expectations established through corporate culture and management, etc.). Safety becomes part of an integrated recipe for success based on “value” rather than being a piece of the pie that can be removed at will when it is only a “priority.”

How Does a Person/Team Perform Safely?

Workplace Examinations. Take three to five minutes when first arriving on shift to examine the work area for hazards that may have been created while you were gone. These include damaged handrails, guards off/missing, hydraulic leaks, oil/grease spills on floor or stairways, hoses on floor/crossing stairs, etc. Correct the problem before starting work so your personal and group exposure to those hazards can be eliminated or reduced.

Observations. Throughout the shift, each team member should observe what is happening around him/her. When working on a group task, take a few minutes...
before you begin to ensure that you have the correct tools, that each person understands his/her role to complete the task, and that each person has been properly trained to perform the task. If necessary, review the safe operating instruction sheet prior to starting the task to remind everyone of the proper technique. Then, each person observes and helps each other do the task correctly, out of the way of any hazards or harm.

**Task Analysis.** Always review/revise the safe operating instruction sheet. A complete “hazard review” of the task must be done to ensure that hazards are identified. Steps are then taken to eliminate or reduce the exposure to the identified hazard(s). It may involve changing a procedure, including other types of PPE or eliminating the task entirely to prevent exposures. This is where individual and team involvement is important, as the entire task is analyzed to ensure that it is performed the best way possible. Be creative and think out of the box to see how to perform the task in a different, better or streamlined way that ensures safe performance.

**Conclusion**

Performance safety causes us to look at what we do and how we do it. It creates proactive teamwork to eliminate hazards from equipment or processes, procedures and people. We all have varying perceptions and views. It is taking all of these components together to come up with a better performance that is safe, effective, productive and profitable. Stick to the basics, and we all benefit.

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