Employee Onboarding: Where Safety & HR Meet

By Trent Shuford

The term “onboarding” has not made it into most dictionaries yet, but a working definition is: “Onboarding refers to the mechanism through which new employees acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviors to become effective organizational members and insiders.”

Employee onboarding is not casual. Turning a new hire over to another employee and saying, “Show ‘em around, will ya?” is not onboarding. Onboarding includes orientation and training but goes beyond those stalwarts of new hire procedures. With onboarding, HR makes a conscious effort to educate and integrate employees into an organization by introducing them to policies, procedures, personnel, rules, traditions and anything else that governs work activities.

The benefits of onboarding include positive outcomes for new employees, such as higher job satisfaction, better job performance, greater organizational commitment and reduction in stress and intent to quit. To this list of benefits of onboarding, you might add one more: a safer and more healthful work experience.

Where Safety Onboarding Comes In
Safety onboarding involves introducing employees to the organization’s occupational safety and health policies and procedures for the purpose of preventing work-related injuries and illnesses.

Training is an important part of safety onboarding. Employees must receive training on the hazards to which they are exposed and how they can protect themselves. While training on specific hazards will vary with the job, all employees must receive training on emergency response: what to do in case of fire, natural disaster or other likely emergencies. OSHA standards address the requirements for safety training.

Safety onboarding should also include:

- Introduction to health and safety program staff
- Value placed on health and safety
- Program goals and objectives
- Expectations of employees in regard to safety
- Overview of workplace injuries and illnesses
- Reporting procedures
- Location of written programs

HR, Health & Safety Coordinate
HR typically oversees onboarding, with the health and safety staff taking the lead role in the safety part.

Onboarding aims to educate and integrate employees, not to overwhelm them. Make onboarding interesting, varied and fun. Involve other employees in the process; everyone offers a different perspective based on their experiences.

Onboarding begins on the first day on the job, but it does not end there; it should continue until the employee is less like a “new kid on the block” and more like an “old hand.”