

Employee Health, Safety & Wellness at L.L.Bean

AN INTERVIEW WITH DEBORAH R. ROY

Deborah R. Roy, M.P.H., RN, COHN-S, CET, CSP, is corporate director of health, safety and wellness for L.L.Bean Inc. In this interview, Roy discusses the company's safety culture and its commitment not only to employee safety, health and wellness, but also to environmental stewardship and conservation.

MPS: Please provide a brief description of your professional background and of your position.

DRR: I began my career as an occupational health nurse who took on more and more safety and industrial hygiene responsibilities because there was no one else to do so. Five years later, I went to graduate school and received an M.P.H. in Occupational Health and Safety from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

I had an interest in chemical safety, and as I was finishing my graduate research, I was hired in the corporate health and safety role at an international environmental consulting firm. That expanded my

chemical safety skills, and I started a consulting firm called SafeTech Consultants, Inc. in 1990 to provide high-hazard chemical training and consulting to a variety of industries.

L.L.Bean, Inc. was one of my longtime clients, and in 2007, the company recruited me into my current role as Director. My staff provides corporate consulting to the global organization in occupational health, safety, environmental and wellness. This includes onsite clinics and fitness facilities along with support for environmental compliance and safety management systems.

MPS: How are SH&E practices effectively managed among L.L.Bean's employees?

DRR: We manage these areas somewhat differently depending on the business unit. Our overall strategy is developed by my group in corporate and is championed by my leader, the chief operations officer (COO). Distribution, manufacturing and the call centers report to the COO and either have achieved Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) Star status or are in the implementation phase for safety and health management systems. Our retail and outlet sites use a standard operating system approach where all operations, including SH&E, are included with everything else to run a store. Stores also use a safety and health management systems approach but with an internal audit process due to the lower number of work hours and workers in stores.

MPS: How would you describe L.L.Bean's safety culture?

DRR: Our safety culture is evolving and varied by area. We have seen significant improvement in the last 10 years with everyone moving in the same direction, just at different paces. Our employees consistently voice their appreciation of the company's six core values, which include safe and healthy living. They understand that their input is valued. Although we implement all safety management system elements, we focus much of our efforts on employee engagement. Most workers see how their efforts improve the productivity and safety of our operations. We have long-service workers who say they stay because of the company commitment.

MPS: What are the greatest SH&E challenges facing the company, and how is it working to overcome them?

DRR: Our major challenge, like most companies, is an aging workforce. Most of our operations are in Maine, the oldest state in the country, and our average age is 48. We are trying a variety of strategies to address this issue, from reengineering our more demanding jobs; to piloting voluntary conditioning programs for employees who want to improve their work fitness level; to better quantifying our job physical demands so people are better matched to the work. Our other challenges include rising healthcare costs and health risks that require



Deborah R. Roy, M.P.H., RN, COHN-S, CET, CSP has been corporate director of health, safety and wellness at L.L.Bean since 2007. For the previous 17 years, she was president and owner of SafeTech Consultants, Inc. in Portland, ME. She has written and lectured extensively on occupational health, safety and prevention. She is certified

by the Board of Certified Safety Professionals, by the National Environmental Safety and Health Training Association and by the American Board for Occupational Health Nurses. Roy is also chair of the Maine Dept. of Environmental Protection's Compliance Advisory Panel. She holds a B.S. in Nursing from Northeastern University in Boston and an M.P.H. in Occupational Health and Safety from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

long-term sustained efforts to reduce or eliminate.

MPS: *What is the key to balancing health, safety and wellness?*

DRR: Our approach has been that healthy employees are more productive, safer at work and at home and have a better quality of life. We support employees in various outdoor fitness events and have an acceptance of our employees exercising during the workday. Our operating areas have stretch breaks led by a frontline employee or supervisor. Volunteerism in the community is encouraged, and team days often involve outdoor activities, such as hiking, kayaking or snowshoeing.

Efforts to improve the health and safety of our workforce have been in place since the early 1980s when we implemented on-site wellness programs. A key to balancing health, safety and wellness is helping employees see that they are all connected. We also make sure the environment that employees work in is conducive to achieving and maintaining a safe and healthy lifestyle.

MPS: *How does the firm show its commitment to environmental stewardship and conservation?*

DRR: For nearly 100 years, L.L.Bean has been committed to environmental stewardship. We sell products that enhance our customers' relationships with the outdoors and continually seek to minimize the adverse impacts that producing, marketing and distributing these products may have on the environment. L.L.Bean conducts business in an environmentally responsible manner using the best environmental practices within our industry.

We encourage wise stewardship of natural resources and respect for the environment among all of our stakeholders. Internal environmental initiatives include energy conservation; greenhouse gas reduction; renewable energy use; commitment to green building through Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design; alternative fuel use in transportation via biofuels and hybrid

vehicles; promotion of alternative commuting methods; and an aggressive corporate recycling program.

Our product and marketing initiatives have been focused on sustainable products; limiting or eliminating harmful chemicals from products; sustainable forest management; packaging reduction efforts and the creation of sustainable, innovative products, such as furniture made from 100% recycled plastic and use of certified wood in furniture. Also, the major focus of our charitable giving program is in the areas of outdoor conservation and recreation. In the past five years, L.L.Bean has donated more than \$6 million toward conservation and land stewardship.

MPS: *What do you consider to be L.L.Bean's most notable safety achievements over the past 5 years?*

DRR: One notable safety achievements in the past 5 years would be our pursuit of safety and health management systems. This process, using the VPP model as a map, has changed the way our leadership and employees think about safety. The culture was always a caring one, and no one ever wanted to see people get hurt. The difference now is that in facilities where we have implemented safety and health management systems, we see leaders and employees engaged in day-to-day safety efforts and taking ownership of personal safety and that of coworkers. We still have a long way to go, but our injury rates, experience modification rate and workers' compensation premiums are the lowest in company history. We are also proud of the fact that our safety staff is keeping customers safe by developing specifications for certain elements of our buildings and providing preconstruction plan review for our new stores and facilities.

MPS: *What do you believe is the secret to L.L.Bean's longevity?*

DRR: It is a family-owned company and a trusted source for quality apparel, reliable outdoor equipment and expert advice since 1912. L.L.Bean products and ser-

vices are recognized around the world. Headquartered in Freeport, ME, the company has grown from a one-man operation to a global organization with annual sales of more than \$1.4 billion.

We mail catalogues to all 50 U.S. states and more than 160 countries; llbean.com is among the top-rated e-commerce sites in the industry; and the company continues to expand stores in the U.S. and internationally in Japan and China. Our Freeport, ME, flagship store is the second-most visited tourist destination in Maine with more than 3 million visitors annually.

For nearly 100 years, the company has achieved its success by holding fast to a foundation of strong ideals—quality products at a reasonable price, legendary satisfaction guarantee, exceptional customer service, an unwavering respect for people and a demonstrated commitment to corporate citizenship and outdoor conservation and recreation. So while the company continues to grow, it maintains the same unwavering commitment to these fundamental values.

MPS: *What are L.L.Bean's SH&E goals and objectives for the remainder of 2011?*

DRR: Our goals are to:

- improve the knowledge level of our safety and health professional staff by requiring certification;
- execute our safety management system plan;
- continuously improve compliance with state and federal laws;
- meet or beat our established metric goals in each business unit;
- continuously improve our onsite occupational health services;
- develop a chronic disease management pilot;
- reduce obesity throughout the organization;
- develop and maintain high-quality wellness programming to address specific corporate health risks;
- maintain an engaged workforce;
- continuously improve satisfaction levels in the business units so we know our staff is adding value. ☺