

Consistently above 95 percent “all safe” for first six months of 2010

STOP™ training programs help reduce injuries and incidents at Knife River Corp. and employees are taking the training home with them.



AN MDU RESOURCES COMPANY

Knife River Corp. is a construction-materials and mining company and one of the nation's largest aggregate producers, providing aggregate, asphalt, building materials, construction services, liquid asphalt and ready-mix concrete to public and private sectors in the United States. Headquartered in Bismarck, North Dakota, Knife River conducts operations in Alaska, Hawaii, Oregon, California, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Texas and Wyoming. It operates as a subsidiary of MDU Resources Group, Inc.

Situation

In 2005, senior management at the Western Oregon Division of the Knife River Corp. was deeply concerned. Despite their best efforts, the company's Recordable Injury Rate (RIR) stubbornly hovered around four to six, and had done so for years. Management knew serious injuries and possible fatalities loomed if they could not turn it around. That was a future they refused to accept. It was time to implement practices to bring the company's safety culture to the next level.

Lynn Gullickson, Safety Resource Manager, was tasked with researching companies that had world-class safety records – those with RIRs less than one. Gullickson discovered such companies had something in common: they all integrated behavior-based practices into their safety programs. One of the most widely used programs was the DuPont™ STOP™ family of workplace safety training tools, which Knife River decided to implement.

Solution

Knife River Corp.'s Western Oregon Division implemented STOP™ For Supervision in 2006. The program trains line management to help mitigate injuries and incidents through worker observations and discussions. Knife River management particularly valued the observation and communication skills taught throughout the program – the positive reinforcement STOP™ teaches. These were the skills needed to most improve if Knife River were to succeed in making everyone feel responsible for safety.

Knife River Case Study

STOP™ For Supervision was rolled out to 40 managers followed by 132 supervisors. The program was so successful, and the feedback so positive from managers, the company decided to open the program a year later to the entire division; comprised of more than 30 working units and 550 employees, including multiple plant sites and working crews.

Knife River chose to use STOP™ For Supervision with line employees to give employees the same level of communication skills – and support to use those skills effectively – as the managers and supervisors received. It was felt advanced communication skills were vital at all levels to reinforce their safety culture.

Knife River used a DuPont consultant to prepare for and lead the initial rollout to its 40 managers, conducting two train-the-trainer sessions known as Implementation Assistance Workshops. Using a consultant was key to the program's overall success in Lynn's opinion. "Having someone with experience with the program that could deal with skeptical managers was valuable," said Mr. Gullickson. "He had 40 skilled, smart managers to deal with, asking him some challenging questions, and he could handle that. He could convince people to try it."

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Next, the division president and the safety resource manager conducted training for the supervisors using a direct implementation method. Putting upper management in charge of this training had a positive impact on the supervisors, and helped drive home the company's commitment to safety. The safety department and the operations managers then conducted training for front-line employees using both direct and cascade implementation methods.



Challenges

Overall, Knife River did not encounter major resistance during its rollout sessions with its managers and supervisors. However, there were isolated areas of resistance among front-line employees. Particularly among long-term workers, field observations were not being completed and the program was not being taken seriously. In these cases, the company brought in the operations manager or the division manager for that particular group to assist with training. If the manager felt the training was not successful, the session would be repeated until the group understood how important the training was.

Knife River Case Study

When one particularly recalcitrant group of workers resisted training altogether, the safety department took the matter up with their manager. The manager instructed the safety department to take the group through the entire training program a second time. They did, and this time the group's direct supervisor had to conduct the training. Putting the supervisor in charge of training helped him to take the program seriously and believe in what he was teaching. That in turn helped the line employees take safety more seriously. The training "took."

Today, Knife River expects all employees to participate in the program. Accountability is achieved through transparency. Managers and supervisors submit their observation cards monthly to the safety department and a spreadsheet is created showing the number of cards turned in and the percentage of required cards turned in by each employee for the year. Employees turning in 100 percent or more of their required cards are highlighted in green, 80 - 99 percent display in yellow, and below 80 percent show in red. The spreadsheet is distributed to the management team on a monthly basis and discussed at the monthly managers' meeting.

Similarly, front-line employees submit their cards to their immediate supervisor and the same system of accountability is followed.

Knife River maintains its safety program through annual refresher classes for all employees that cover the basics of STOP™ training. The company also requires two formal observations a month. Divisions within the company with historically higher injury rates may require one formal observation each week.



The safety department also, from time to time, selects certain topics to focus on within the safety observation checklist. This not only helps motivate employees to do the observations thoroughly, but also helps drive injury prevention through heightened awareness. For example, in 2008, the company experienced a high number of hand injuries. To combat the problem, in 2009, the company highlighted potential hand injuries and personal protective equipment use for hands on the checklist.

Results

Since implementing STOP™ For Supervision, Knife River Corporation's Western Oregon Division has had a 65 percent reduction in injuries – from 31 recordable injuries in 2005 to 11 in 2009. Days away from work has dropped 85 percent – from 597 days away from work in 2005 to 91 in 2009. The division also has gone from 60 to 70 percent "all safe" in 2006 on the observation checklist to consistently above 95 percent "all safe" through the first six months of 2010.

Knife River Case Study

Where the culture change is most apparent, however, is not at work. It's in the home. Knife River is discovering that its employees are taking the training with them and voluntarily applying it at home. "When you change the culture at home, you know it's ingrained because no one is looking over their shoulder," said Mr. Gullickson.

On average, most employees took two years to truly "get it," but the payoff has been huge, according to Lynn. For example, a long-time employee who was initially resistant to change recently thanked the company for implementing the STOP™ program. He shared how he was working at home to cut down a few tree limbs after a storm. As he was awkwardly crawling up the tree with one hand and fumbling with equipment in the other, he realized how unsafe his actions were. He remembered all his safety training during the past few years, including the safety observations and checklists, and realized he was putting himself at risk. The employee climbed back down and went to get fall protection and a rope to hoist up his equipment. He admitted something was going to happen to him down the road if he continued that way, and the training helped him see that. It made a difference in how he thought. So, he concluded, if STOP™ could change him, it could change anybody!



"When you change the culture at home, you know it's ingrained because no one is looking over their shoulder. They understand the importance of safety and why we are doing it."

Lynn Gullickson
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