



# ALABAMA MUNICIPAL INSURANCE CORPORATION MUNICIPAL WORKERS COMPENSATION FUND, INC.

*Loss Control Division*



ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE SAFETY PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION:

## What is a workplace safety and health program?

A workplace safety and health program is a term that describes what people- business owners, managers, and employees – do to control injuries and illnesses at their workplace.

A workplace safety and health program is just a concept, but it's an important one. Think for a moment about how you control injuries and illnesses at your workplace. Your safety and health program reflects how you manage the safety and health of your employees.

## Safety and health programs: they're not all the same

There are probably as many different types of safety and health programs as there are businesses. If you manage just a few employees in a low-risk industry, your program is likely to be a simple one; just being a careful observer, listening to your employees' concerns and responding to them, for example.

As businesses grow and become more complex so do their safety and health programs. For example, if you're a safety director in large manufacturing plant, your program might be reflected in pages of written policies and procedures. Safety and health management is a full-time job in large organizations.

## Think about how you manage workplace safety and health

We can't tell you how to manage workplace safety and health in your business because that's your responsibility. Rather, we're asking you to think about how you manage workplace safety and health. Regardless of who you are – a small business owner, a division manager, or supervisor on the shop floor – your role in managing workplace safety and health is an important one.

## Link thinking with doing

We didn't create this guide just to get you thinking, however. You don't deliver products and services just by thinking about them, and you don't manage workplace safety and health just by thinking about it.

We want you to think about how you can improve your safety and health program and we want you to put your thoughts into practice. Because linking thinking with doing makes your safety and health program even better than it is now.

## Successful programs

### What makes a workplace safety and health program successful?

Successful safety and health programs achieve and maintain safe, healthful workplaces. The key words are: achieve and maintain. To achieve something, you make it a goal and work to accomplish it. Then, once you accomplish the goal, you work to maintain it. If you're a business owner or manager, this wisdom comes as no surprise – that's what you do to stay in business.

### Elements of successful programs

Look at any business that has a safe, healthful workplace, and you'll find the following seven elements:

1. Managers are *committed* to making the program work.
2. Employees are held *accountable* for following safe work practices.
3. Employees are *involved* in the program.
4. Employees know how to *identify* and *control* hazards.
5. Employees know how to *investigate* near-miss incidents and accidents.
6. Employees and managers are *educated* and *trained* in safe work practices.
7. Managers *review* the program regularly.

These seven elements together make workplace safety and health programs successful. We call them elements, but we could have called them components, ingredients, or puzzle pieces. When you put them all together – in the right way – you've achieved a successful program.

### Achieving a successful program

Your program may have some strong elements and some that need strengthening. You achieve a successful program by maintaining the strong ones and improving the weaker ones. The following section takes a closer look at these seven elements. It describes them and gives examples showing how they contribute to a successful program.

## The elements of successful programs

### MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT

#### *Becoming committed*

A successful workplace safety and health program achieves and maintains a safe, healthful workplace. To accomplish this goal, you'll need to demonstrate your commitment to safety and health with as much energy as you would to any other important part of your business. What you say is important, but what you do is critical to your program's success. Showing commitment to a safe, healthful workplace links what you say with what you do.

### *Examples*

You can show your commitment in many ways. Here are four examples:

- You have a written mission statement and policy that emphasize the importance you place on workplace safety and health.
- You want to know why accidents happen.
- You read the minutes of safety committee meetings and act on the committee's recommendations.
- You make sure employees follow safe work procedures – and you follow them, too.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

### *Being accountable*

Accountability links responsibilities to consequences. As a business owner or manager, you are responsible for making your business a successful one. "Passing the buck" isn't an option. When Harry Truman said, "The buck stops here," he meant that he was responsible for his decisions and he accepted the consequences that followed them.

Accountability also helps your employees understand that you're committed to achieving and maintaining a safe, healthful workplace. It reinforces the importance of the program and ensures that, when it comes to working safely, no one can "pass the buck".

### *Examples*

Here are four ways to strengthen accountability:

- Employees' written job descriptions clearly state their safety and health responsibilities.
- Employees have enough authority, education, and training to accomplish their responsibilities.
- Employees are praised for jobs well done.
- Employees who behave in ways that could harm them or others are appropriately disciplined. The keys to appropriate discipline: be sincere, don't threaten, and have no hidden agendas.

## EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

### *Getting employees involved*

Effective safety and health programs involve employees who have a stake in the program's success. One of the best ways to involve employees is through a safety committee: a group of employees – representing labor and management – that is responsible for promoting workplace safety and health. Employees can volunteer to be part of the committee or their peers can elect them.

### *Examples*

The following are examples of employee involvement in your safety and health program:

- You promote the program, and employees know that you're committed to a safe, healthful workplace.
- Employees help you review and improve the program.
- Employees take safety education and training classes. They can identify hazards and suggest how to eliminate or control them.
- Employees volunteer to participate on the safety committee.

## ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

### *Investigating incidents and accidents*

Despite your best efforts, you may not be able to prevent all workplace accidents and near-miss incidents. Many accidents and near-miss incidents have preventable, but underlying, causes. Examples include unenforced policies, lack of supervision, and inadequate training.

By investigating all accidents and near-miss incidents, you reduce the chance that they'll happen again.

### *Examples*

Here are two ways to strengthen accident and incident investigations:

- Find out the underlying causes of accidents and near-miss incidents.
- Involve your safety committee in investigating the causes of accidents and near-miss incidents.

## EDUCATION TRAINING

### *Educating and training*

Your employees need to know about the workplace hazards to which they may be exposed, how to recognize the hazards, and how to control their exposure. The best way for them to gain this knowledge is through education and training.

Why education and training? Education teaches why safe practices and procedures are important; education affects attitudes about safety and attitudes affect behavior. Training, on the other hand, improves skills necessary for working safely.

Employees should know safety and health rules, worksite hazards, safe work procedures, and what to do in emergencies. New-employee orientations, periodic safety and health training, and emergency drills build this knowledge.

Supervisors and managers also need education and training: education to help them in their leadership roles and training to enhance their skills in identifying and controlling hazards.

### *Examples*

Here are three examples that demonstrate you've educated and trained your employees about the importance of workplace safety and health:

- Employees know what workplace hazards could harm them.
- Employees know how to control or eliminate their exposure to hazards.
- Everyone – employees, supervisors, and managers – understands their safety and health responsibilities.

## HAZARD IDENTIFICATION

### *Identifying and controlling hazards*

Before you can control hazards, you need to identify where they are. There are many ways to identify hazards. If your business is a small one, you may be able to walk around the workplace and look for them. On the other hand, if you work in a large manufacturing plant – say you're the safety director – you may need to do a comprehensive workplace survey.

Common ways of controlling hazards include engineering and administrative controls. The engineering approach eliminates hazards by using appropriate tools and equipment and by designing work processes that are hazard-free.

Administrative controls, on the other hand, don't eliminate hazards. Rather, they reduce exposure by changing work practices. Examples include rotating workers among jobs, exercise programs, periodic rest breaks, and making work procedures less stressful.

Personal protective equipment offers a third way to protect workers from hazards, but it doesn't control hazards; it acts as a barrier against them. Today's personal protective equipment is "hazard-specific." Before you invest in personal protective equipment, know the hazards it protects against. Be sure that it fits and is acceptable to those who will use it. Always train employees how to wear, use, and maintain personal protective equipment.

### *Examples*

Successful programs identify and control workplace hazards in the following ways:

- Employees report hazards to a supervisor or safety committee member. You respond to their concerns.
- Employees keep tools and equipment working properly; they follow periodic maintenance schedules and safe work procedures.
- You've planned and prepared for emergencies. Employees know what to do when something goes wrong.
- You respond promptly to employee concerns about workplace hazards.
- You eliminate or control workplace hazards promptly with engineering or administrative controls – and with personal protective equipment, if necessary.