Safety Training Tips

SafetyNet #: 39

Safety is a part of every employee's job. Knowing how to work safely is just as critical as coming to work on time or selecting the right equipment. It is the responsibility of every supervisor to ensure that employees learn and practice safe work habits. This SafetyNet will assist supervisors in understanding and applying safety training techniques to individual situations.

No conscientious supervisor would allow an untrained employee to perform a hazardous task. Federal and California laws require safety training. Many California Occupational Health and Safety Administration (Cal/OSHA) mandated programs require training and specific training documentation practices. Most safety training is best performed by supervisors. Supervisors are named in several OSHA mandated programs as being responsible and accountable for assuring employees receive training prior to starting work or any time a new material or process is introduced. The supervisor is usually the most knowledgeable individual about the job and its hazards. The supervisor is also best able to evaluate safety as a part of overall job performance.

OSHA GUIDELINES

Cal/OSHA has general rules for testing the appropriateness of training.

- Training must be specific to the hazards of individual job assignments.
- Clearly inform employees what conditions are infractions of departmental safety rules.
- Give supervised work experience before allowing employees to perform hazardous operations on their own.

TRAINING TECHNIQUES

Safety training can be accomplished in many different ways. Supervisors should evaluate these alternative techniques and determine which one(s) will work best for their employees.

- **On-the-job safety training and one-on-one discussions** with employees are usually the most effective and time efficient when combined with on-the-job skills training.
- **Safety meetings** can be very valuable in cases requiring group cooperation (for instance, ensuring that a group knows how to organize in an emergency).
Examination of case histories, scenarios, and role-playing are often used in group situations. These techniques require advance preparation on the part of the instructor and careful consideration of the audience. Some audiences will respond well while others may not.

Lectures are the cheapest, most commonly used, and least effective method of safety training. Involving trainees in discussions or question and answer sessions are methods to make lectures more effective.

Demonstrations that are interactive and encourage audience participation allow a larger group to be a part of specific on-the-job training.

Audiovisual (AV) materials and computer-based demonstrations or programs are effective when “live” demonstrations are too costly or hazardous. Computer-based programs can be effective for “refresher” training.

Printed materials are useful as supplementary information, but the material and audience must be compatible. These materials are useful for training individuals who have a good grasp of the subject material but who may need a “refresher” or additional information to fill in gaps.

When deciding which combination of approaches will work best, the supervisor must keep the information and the audience in mind. For instance, lecture style would not be suitable for training employees in the safe operation of a centrifuge. A demonstration to a small group or one-on-one on-the-job training is a better method. Audiovisual (AV) materials are ideal for illustrating the consequences of improper solvent storage or other inappropriate procedures that might be dangerous or too costly to demonstrate.

The safety trainer must also consider the conditions under which the training will be given. Is an area available in which employees will be able to view AV materials comfortably or listen to a lecture without distractions?

ATTITUDES
Supervisors may have difficulty convincing their staff to take safety training or safety measures seriously. The problem may lie in the supervisor’s attitude, the employee's attitude, or supervisor-employee communications.

Sometimes supervisors have trouble convincing themselves of the value of safety training. With this mindset, they will certainly not be able to persuade their employees that safety training is worthwhile. Supervisors who have questions about why certain safety training is necessary are encouraged to call EH&S. We can provide practical incentives for safety training. Often the supervisor finds that his or her objections are not to the training itself but to the way it has been traditionally presented. For example, if you dislike a videotape that is used to illustrate the safe handling of radioisotopes, we can help you find an alternative.

Inappropriate safety training may negatively influence employees. Being forced to attend lectures on safety topics that do not concern them or that are well below their level of competence are two major reasons employees feel that safety training is trivial. Supervisors should actively solicit employee feedback concerning the safety training they have received
and then act on the employee comments as much as possible.

Employees and supervisors may also become complacent. They may believe they have been on the job so long that they know everything possible about health and safety. They may think because they have worked haphazardly for many months or years without adverse consequences that the hazards of the job have been overemphasized. Supervisors must consider the temperament of the individual employee when deciding how to overcome these attitudes. A simple suggestion is for the supervisor to first approach the employee with genuine friendly concern (e.g., "I've noticed that you often don't wear your safety goggles when using the grinder and I'm very concerned because there is a real chance of injury from flying metal particles. Don't they fit properly or do they bother you somehow?"). An employee faced with this approach should not feel that he or she is being accused of some defective behavior. If the first approach is not successful, subsequent approaches may be regulatory, authoritarian, or an appeal to the employee's self-interest.

Safety performance should be assessed at the time of each performance evaluation. SafetyNet #64 [1], "Guidelines for Evaluating Safety Performance", can assist supervisors. When writing the evaluation, remember to point out positive aspects of employee safety performance as well as negative ones.

EH&S is often asked how a supervisor can train an employee who knows more about the subject matter than the supervisor does. This employee can be an asset to the safety training program. He or she could train other employees or develop the safety program for the unit. (The employee should be rewarded for doing a good job by noting the fact on the performance evaluation.) If the individual has a great deal of knowledge but has some weak areas or needs a regulatory update, try to present the information as concisely as possible. A good method is to supply the employee with pertinent written material to be read by a certain date, initialed, and returned to the supervisor. In general, knowledgeable employees should not be required to attend basic classes or lectures or shown elementary AV programs. These tactics, while often the path of least resistance, can actually worsen safety performance. The employee gets the message that safety is so unimportant to management that they will not make even the slightest effort to prepare an individualized program.

**MEASURING TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS**

Methods of gauging the effectiveness of safety training include:

- **Performance tests or demonstrations.** Each employee demonstrates for the instructor the safe method just taught. Demonstrations can be time-consuming, but very useful.

- **Written tests.** The cheapest, easiest, most commonly used but least reliable method. Tests are suitable for discovering the extent of knowledge about a regulatory topic, policy change, or other nonperformance subject.

- **Random on-the-job observation.** Effective if the supervisor or instructor immediately corrects any unsafe behavior and rewards the employee for incorporating the safety instructions into the job. Observation is not inherently time-consuming, since the supervisor should be observing employees anyway.
Determining the contribution of the safety training program to employee safety performance is not easy because so many other factors enter into an employee's decision whether to work safely or not. Some of these factors are the state of management-employee relations, work area design, employee fatigue or inattention, and pressure from less safety-conscious peers.

**DOCUMENTATION**

Good documentation is essential for the success of any safety training program. Supervisors must be able to prove to regulatory agencies that safety training has, in fact, been carried out. Proper documentation consists of the following four elements:

- Date of training
- Who presented the training
- Names of attendees and, if possible, their signatures
- An outline of topics discussed and a copy of handout materials.

Documentation should be kept with departmental personnel records.

**EH&S RESOURCES**

Upon request, EH&S will assist supervisors in providing safety training. Some types of assistance we can offer are:

- **Classes.** EH&S offers safety classes on a variety of topics throughout the year. These classes are primarily designed to inform employees about regulations and UC Davis policy and are not intended as complete safety training programs.

- **Audiovisual and printed materials.** Campus units can borrow slide shows and/or videotapes from EH&S. Supervisors can also obtain printed materials, including SafetyNets, for use in their training programs. An on-line inventory of AV materials and a complete list of SafetyNets available from EH&S are detailed on our web site. Videos may be checked out from the Carlson Health Sciences Library.

- **Speakers.** EH&S representatives are available to speak to employees or students about health and safety.

**THE LAST WORD**

No safety training program is effective unless safety is actively promoted by the supervisor and applied on the job.

**Contact**

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More information
Related content

1. Guidelines for Evaluating Safety Performance

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