

Case Study # 5

Small Chemical Processor

This small business case study company is a specialty chemical company located in Rochester, NY. The site assessment included two buildings separated by a street. The first building houses much of the office space of the company, the chemical mixing area, a silk screen printing area, a toilet seat cover fabrication area, and extensive warehousing space. The second building also contains office space and warehousing, in addition to a feminine care products fabrication and packaging area. The company employs many temporary employees who speak little or no English among those who don't speak English, there are at least two different major languages including Spanish and Laotian in addition to their full time employees.

Grant Work:

After the initial gap analysis, walkthrough and meetings, it was evident that this company was going to be presenting unique problems, due to the combination of the large variety of process that occurred and the age of the facilities. A note about the age of the building according to the contact, the first Xerox copy machine was built in their facility, and the building date back to around the turn of the 20th century. The company was extremely welcoming of RIT assistance, and progress of their safety and health program.

As noted above the facilities are extremely old, therefore many of the issues observed were directly linked to the age of the facility. In many areas the floors were uneven creating drastic slopes in some areas and pockmarked creating tripping hazards, Areas that still have wooden floors were especially uneven. Fork trucks traveling over these wooden areas would create much noise and provide a frightening experience for the people in the floor below. The company is in the process of redoing much of it's flooring with concrete which will likely remedy a majority of the problems

There were a lot of observations regarding general housekeeping. In more than one occasion passageways were partial blocked by drums or pallets. There are markings on the floor to demarcate passage ways, except they were often obscured, ignored, faded or entirely absent. In other areas pallets and drums were unevenly stacked, or balancing precariously on one another or leaning sharply and straining against the binding materials. Numerous pallets were in poor condition. In the chemical mixing areas hoses and buckets were laying across the walkway obstructing traffic.

Also due to the age of the plant and slow preventative maintenance there were many areas that were rather darks due to burnt out light bulbs. In many parts of the warehouse egress was not readily apparent and lacked clear demarcations. On several occasions it was difficult to tell which direction to go in case of an emergency. The emergency and exit lighting where present was often obscured or poorly illuminated due to faulty/broken bulbs or the accumulation of dust and grime.

All of the issues listed above are generally listed as housekeeping or building maintenances and others minor issues including guarding issues and other issues discovered during walkthroughs were discussed and explained to the safety and health department, which then began to remedy the problems immediately.

This company uses forklifts extensively in their warehouse area and this creates a multitude of problems. On many of the storage racks there were dented legs and some cases bent back legs from trucks driving into them while storing pallets. The drivers of the fork trucks blatantly violated rules such as seatbelts, sounding horns and slowing down at blind corners.

In looking back to the training used, it was discovered that the materials presented in a way where they were not in the slightest way effective. The fork training was a slap together of many different resources, often off center and angled copies. The training materials itself were much disorganized and could the reader would lose interest extremely fast. The test and evaluation used were written in a negative context, which is not helpful to the learning process. The RIT assistants rewrote the training materials so that they would be much more effective and professional looking, the test and evaluation sections were taken from the negative context and turned positive which was a major undertaking.

Noise was an issue in several areas of the facility. In the toilet seat cover fabrication area, and the feminine hygiene care products department, noise levels were noted to be over 90dBa (SLM measurement). These areas did not have hearing protection signage in place and it was noted on several occasions' employees without and PPE on. The company has an extensive hearing conservation program.

The biggest problem that this company has its management systems for safety and health. There is no method for dealing with employees who violate company safety policies. Also there is a break down in the management chain. The break occurs between first line supervision and management. This leaves safety and health department in a bind with first line supervisors seeing the dept as toothless and often ignores them. The first line supervisors also don't know what their responsibility is in the health and safety circle, since it hasn't been handed directly down from management.

RIT assistants recognized this as the major problem, after several reports delivered directly to the president of the company explaining the problems present, a meeting between the RIT assistants and principle investigator, first line supervision, safety and health dept. and the upper level of management including the president of the company. This meeting was aimed at explaining the link and necessity of Top down and back up management, and emphasizing restoring the break between first line supervision and the rest of the company. As a result of this meeting a second meeting was set up with the president of the company to rewrite the company's goals and objectives, and discuss how to reform the management system.

Follow up:

This company has suffered a few set backs in regards to its safety and health program. The person in charge of the safety program left the company. This set back was only minor, there were several employees that were trained and the new person in charge of the program has reviewed the training materials that were used.

The follow up gap analysis showed that this company has made strides forward in their safety and health programs. They have taken to heart several aspects of the training we presented to them. As with the other companies, they were made aware of the importance of involving the employees into the process, and therefore they have formed teams including employees to help assess and improve upon the current processes. The teams will identify the potential safety hazards and seek to find ways on how to make them safe and more efficient. Through the teams and current training, the employees are starting to understand their safety and health responsibilities

They have also faced some other set backs, while managements attitudes on safety have changed for the better, they still fall back to basic management principles. For example, in an effort to increase the rate of employees that actually fill out the forms, a new form for reporting incidents that was more user friendly was developed. However, some employees expressed the view that the forms were too complex and they still would not bother with them.

This company is on the road to having a great health and safety program, they seem to be committed to the process and have taken hold of the concept, but must continue to build support for the system.