



PROFITS WITH SAFETY IN THE SMALL BUSINESS

As a small business owner, you are a risk taker. There is excitement and challenge in such a venture, but to succeed you need good management information, an ability to be a good manager of people and the intelligence and inner strength to make the right decisions. From unnecessary risk taking, thousands of workers die each year and many suffer injury or illness from conditions at work.

How often does an owner or manager actually see work-related deaths, serious injuries or illnesses in the workplace? In some small businesses, the answer is rarely. For this reason, many owners or managers do not understand why there is controversy about the government having occupational safety and health agencies with enforceable laws. But others have learned why; unfortunately, they have experienced a loss. These owner/managers will tell you that it is too late to do anything once a serious accident happens. They have learned that prevention is the only real way to avoid this loss and unnecessary risk taking.

Reducing losses and risks are goals that you as an owner or manager must set in assuring the safety and well being of all in the business. Small business owners and managers place a high value on the well-being of your employees. Family members and personal acquaintances may be part of the business and even hired employees will become almost like family as time goes by.

Investing in safety and health activity now will better enable you to avoid possible losses in the future.

Nobody wants accidents to happen in the workplace. A serious fire, a permanent injury, or the death of an employee or owner can cause the loss of profit or even an entire business. To prevent such losses, you don't have to turn your business upside down. You may not have to spend a lot of money, either. You do need to use good business sense and apply safety prevention policies. There are reasons why accidents happen. An accident always has a cause and a reason why. Once you know why an accident happened, it is possible to prevent future incidents.

The business needs a plan to prevent accidents. Not all dangers at the workplace depend on an accident to cause harm, of course. Worker exposure to toxic chemicals or harmful levels of noise or even radiation may cause gradual illness over a long period of time. There needs to be a plan that includes prevention of these unseen health hazard exposures. There needs to have a safety and health management system. It is not difficult to develop such a plan. Basically, the plan should address the types of accidents and health hazard exposures that could happen in the workplace. Because each workplace is different, the program should address the specific needs and requirements for the business.

There are four basic elements to all good safety and health programs. These are as follows:

- 1) The manager needs to lead the way, by setting policy, assigning and supporting responsibility, setting an example and involving employees.
- 2) The workplace needs to be continually analyzed to identify all existing and potential hazards.
- 3) Methods to prevent or control existing or potential hazards are put in place, maintained, and updated.
- 4) Managers, supervisors and employees need to be trained to understand and deal with worksite hazards.

Regardless of the size of the business, the plan should use each of these points to prevent workplace accidents and possible injuries and illnesses. Developing a workplace program following these four points is a key step in protecting you and your workers' safety and health. If you already have a program, reviewing it in relation to these points should help you improve what you have.

Following this four-point approach to safety and health in your business may also improve efficiency. It may help you reduce insurance claims and other costs. The plan will certainly give you a way to express and document your good faith and commitment to protecting your workers' health and safety.

This approach usually does not involve large costs. Developing a health and safety protection plan does not have to be expensive and generally does not require additional employees, especially in smaller businesses. Safety and health can be integrated into your other business functions with modest effort on your part and will become part of the daily routine.

The key to the success of a safety and health plan and program is to see it as a part of the business operation and to see it reflected in the day-to-day operations. Once implemented, the safety program will become second nature to the owner as well as the employees.