Are we safe or just lucky?

Looking at Risk, not Result, in measuring the success of your company’s safety program.

While one of my primary duties with WBMA is to help ensure our members are compliant with OSHA and state regulations, I’ll be the first to admit that being compliant and having a safe workplace can at times be two completely different things.

Why? In determining if we give our safety efforts a passing grade we tend to look at what happened, rather than what could happen. If you have only had a couple scraps and/or close calls, chances are you didn’t take huge steps in changing your safety measures (i.e. minor injuries = get minor attention). There is an inherent risk in this approach. If we focus on outcomes to determine our safety decisions, we may miss important information showing that a high potential for serious injuries exists.

Consider the following scenario and three different outcomes:

An open unit of 2x8’s is stored up high in your yards racks and while working below one of the pieces falls and:

1. Narrowly misses your employee
2. Scratches the arm of your employee requiring only a Band-Aid.
3. Strikes your employee in the head requiring them be hospitalized overnight.

In this example, we have the exact same level of potential for an injury, yet three different outcomes.

So what happens if we take the traditional approach of looking at the outcome in making safety decisions?

If the serious injury in outcome 3 were the result, we would likely to do an investigation. During our investigation we find out that some of your employees have been concerned for years about the stability of several bent arms on the racks. This leads you to fix the bent arms and update your safe storage policy to require a metal band be put around large loads stored in the top rack.

But... If outcomes 1 and 2 were the result, we would probably make no measurable changes, nor engage in an analysis of the risk posed and the best ways to fix it.

Diverting Valuable Resources

Time and money are valuable and limited resources in our industry. Whether we like it or not, the attention we give to safety can put a strain on both. If we modify our findings from the investigation above, this time we find that the racks were in great shape, a policy is in place and followed which requires banding on the unit. Additionally, the employee was acting safely, wearing a hardhat and their work area was well lit.

Here, the 2x8 falling was the result of a one in a million freak accident that couldn't have been avoided with more policies and procedures. Like before, if we had only looked at the outcome and not the risk exposure in determining our follow up, then we likely would have used up a lot of that valuable time and money changing work procedures that in the end result in a negligible improvement in the overall safety of your lumberyard.

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Benefits of focusing on potential, not outcomes

Moving away from reacting to outcomes and instead looking at potential will have several key benefits to your operation, including:

1. Allowing you to focus your resources, giving you more value for the time you invest in safety;
2. Producing more valuable indicators as to the risks that exist at your facility;
3. Studies show that employees are far more likely to buy into a “safety culture” when they see management focusing on safety measures with the highest potential for injuries.

Reminder: New HAZCOM Rules Now Fully in Effect

As of June 1st, all WBMA members are required to have a new/updated written Hazard Communication Program. With the introduction of the new Globally Harmonized System, MSDS’s have gone away and are being replaced by SDS’s (Safety Data Sheets). Under the new standard, which can be found here, employers should also ensure that all employees have been trained on the specifics of the program. Have questions or need help updating your Hazcom program? Give WBMA a call, or send an email to Tom@wbma.org

Quote of the Month:

“If opportunity doesn’t knock, build a door.”
Milton Berle

Upcoming Events:

2016

July 19th
- WBMA Executive & Board Meetings:
  Radisson Hotel, Seattle WA

October 5th – 6th
- Part 2 of WBMA’s Leadership Series:
  Financials for Non-Financial Managers

November 7-9
- WBMA’s 114th Annual Convention,
  Red Lion Jantzen Beach, Portland OR

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About the Author/Disclaimer:
Tom Rider is Manager of Member Services for Western Building Material Association. He is committed to being a valued resource to its members particularly on regulatory compliance issues affecting building material suppliers. Unless stated otherwise, this regulatory newsletter is written by him. He is a lawyer, but respectfully he is not your lawyer (unless you have been in his office and signed a contract). This communication is not intended as legal advice, and no attorney client relationship results merely by reading it. Please consult your own attorney for legal advice. If you are a WBMA member and would like to contact Tom with questions and/or comments: tom@wbma.org