

## Workplace Safety

There are many reasons for implementing workplace safety practices. The goal of a safe and productive workplace, free from hazards which put employees, customers and the organization itself at peril, should be first and foremost. Less altruistic, but nonetheless valid reasons for a workplace safety program may consist of compliance with the mandates of federal and state regulatory agencies; the negative press, fines and citations that come with the absence thereof; and the ever increasing costs of property, casualty and workers compensation insurance.

Safety programs must be tailored to fit each organization. One size does not fit all. Each organization has its own peculiar needs. While needs may vary, it is imperative that an organization's facilities and operations be inspected on a regular, routine basis and that all applicable fire and life safety code violations be corrected as quickly as possible. The purpose of an inspection program is to identify and remedy hazards before they lead to injuries and claims. It also sends the message that safety is a priority of the organization and helps foster a safe atmosphere.

A workplace inspection program can be broken down into five main components.

### **General Safety**

Workers should always be aware of their surroundings. Is there adequate light? Are there any tripping hazards which need to be addressed? Are furnishings and equipment free from defect? Are Material Safety Data sheets readily available and used? The list goes on... To be safe, you must understand what "safe" is.

### **Fire and Electrical Hazard Prevention and Safety**

An organization that ignores fire and electrical codes does so at its own risk and faces the possibility of losses of epic proportions. Fire extinguishers should be readily available, tested regularly and their operation should be explained to every employee. Fire alarms must be in working order and inspected on a routine basis; and fire drills need to be a regular part of normal operations. These fire drills should be both planned and unplanned to gauge their effectiveness. Electrical outlets and circuitry should be available in proportion to their need and should not be overloaded. Electrical panels should be properly labeled and flammable or combustible materials should not be stored nearby.

### **General Environmental Control (Housekeeping)**

An organization should strive to have a place for everything and see to it that things are kept in their place. Uncorrected, housekeeping concerns create a definite risk for injury and loss of productivity. Flooring needs to be observed on a regular basis and problems such as liquid spills, snow and rain and deteriorated conditions need to be corrected as quickly as possible. Waste receptacles need to be emptied regularly and trash that doesn't "hit the can" needs to be picked up. Work and storage areas need to be kept clean and clear of debris or clutter.

## **Egress**

When the unexpected happens, everyone must have a way out of the facility and needs to know the best and quickest way to get out. All exits need to be clearly marked and emergency lighting should be available to provide illumination if the power goes out. There should be emergency evacuation routes posted conspicuously throughout the facility and these egress routes must be kept open and clear of clutter. Stairways should be constructed according to code and have handrails.

## **Maintenance**

Doors and locks need to be in working order. Ceiling tiles should be intact, free from damage and where they belong. Windows should be unbroken and fully operational. Light bulbs need to be replaced as quickly as they burn out. Parking lots and sidewalks need to be kept in good shape and free from hazards such as uneven pavement, overgrown landscaping and traffic obstructions. Grass needs to be kept mown and trimmed and ground defects need to be addressed regularly.

Clearly, these lists are not exhaustive and much more can and should be done.

Effective workplace safety is not an added expense, it's a benefit and it's everybody's job! The West Virginia Board of Risk and Insurance Management stands ready to help each of its insured implement programs and procedures which will promote workplace safety and reduce the possibility of loss. Let us help YOU help yourself!

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