

IMPLEMENTING AN EFFECTIVE SAFETY INCENTIVE PROGRAM

By Gary Hanson, President
American Safety & Health Management Consultants, Inc.

Safety Incentive Programs have been around for a long time and they take many forms. Some have worked well while others fizzled out or don't accomplish the intended goal. Sometimes the rewards don't improve performance desired, sometimes the reason why the award is offered gets lost and becomes a give away, some companies simply lose their interest in the program.

The problem with many Incentive Programs is that there isn't a set goal that motivates employees, it isn't easy to administer and it isn't designed to achieve a deserved goal long term that makes the cost and effort worth the effort. Employees lose interest and the company loses interest.

I recently visited a company that set up an Incentive Program where they will give away a brand new car every six months that they go 6 months without an OSHA Recordable Injury. So far they have not made their goal. The car is a significant award but I don't believe that it provides the type of motivation that will effectively influence the Safety Behavior of the 150 employees that work in the plant.

Many companies try this approach. It sounds good and can make a publicity splash. The problem is individual employees do not believe they have a chance to win. Therefore, their behavior doesn't change. The longer a company goes without anyone winning the award the less interest there is in it. I refer to these programs as the Loser Award Program. What I mean by this is there may be a winner but everyone else loses. These programs usually do not succeed and have only short term success.

The best Incentive Programs incorporate the following Key Elements:

- * The Goal must be attainable
- * The value of the award must be worth the employee's effort
- * It must be designed to make employees feel like they accomplished something important
- * It must be based on awarding each individual for their efforts
- * Smaller awards need to be given out at short term intervals, more than 3 months (Short Term Awards)
- * Larger individual awards should be given out annually
- * It must be easy to administer
- * It must be designed to help the company achieve it's safety goals

When setting up an Incentive Program keep the above elements in mind. First establish a short term goal for the Plant to achieve. Usually this can be a reduction in injuries or the OSHA Incident Rate. Keep the reduction within reason and achievable. Set short term group awards that recognize achievement based on this. Make it easy to administer. Awards such as pizza, logo products or gift certificates work well.

Set individual awards for going a year without an injury or if the Plant achieves it, a yearly goal. This award should be more substantial, but everyone should be included. Establish a budget. Some companies look at a cost reduction target and share a percentage of the savings. Make the awards important, show your employees your appreciation. Have a key manager hand out the annual awards. Advertise the success of the achievement, post it on the bulletin board, put an article in the company paper if you have one or send a letter to each employee advising them of the accomplishment. Lastly, sustain the enthusiasm on an ongoing basis.

Employees like to be recognized, they want a pat on the back or way to go, but, it must be seen as important to the company. It also must be worth the effort and be attainable, positively impacting employee moral not only reducing injuries it also reduces absenteeism, improves productivity and reduces many of the other nagging employee issues that impacts a company's ability to be successful.

If you have any questions or need assistance with your Safety Program, please give me a call at 1-800-356-1274.