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Behavior-based safety: The piece forgotten

You want your workers to think before they act, change inaccurate or undesirable perceptions and create new safety habits. That's why you've implemented a behavior-based safety (BBS) process! If this is how you described the purpose for your behavioral approach to safety, think about what it says to the worker. Doesn't this convey they are the problem? It is definitely not a message that will spark involvement in change.

The vast majority of approaches to behavioral safety still focus solely on coaching the individual to change their behavior. There are many occasions to help people understand the way they think and the way they do things can contribute to the prevention of accidents. In fact, this is critical. But if you stop there, you will have missed a huge opportunity.

After countless years of reviewing incident reports, I came to a conclusion that will surely raise some skepticism — behaviors cannot be the root cause of an incident! While investigating an incident, it is not uncommon to stop gathering information once it is determined a behavior contributed to the undesirable event. This is due to the inability of some incident investigators to answer the next question, "Why did the person do that?" People do things for a reason. If you don't identify the reason, you will never truly remove the barriers so tasks can be performed as safely as possible every time, everywhere.

Obstacles

While recently participating in peer-to-peer observations during a BBS process review, I quickly noticed a piece of the process had been left out. An observer noticed a worker standing on a plastic bucket to get access to a valve. The observer pointed out the identified safe items then provided feedback, encouraging the individual to consider using something else next time. The worker agreed and the observation was complete.

Before walking away, I asked the worker a very simple question, "Out of curiosity, why are you using a bucket?" The worker stated smaller ladders and stepstools were supplied at their location, however, they were often misplaced. As a result, these tools were locked up. Unfortunately, the people who had access to unlock these tools were not easy to locate. As to be expected, people did what they felt necessary to get the job done. This discussion uncovered an obstacle to safety performance. Thankfully, it was prior to an incident occurring.

Barriers

During a similar BBS process review at a site experiencing a large percentage of hand injuries, a barrier was identified. Rather than simply coaching the use of PPE for hands, I again directed the observers to gather insight into what workers were doing and why. Very quickly, beyond employee behavior, we identified one of the major contributors to hand injuries. We found the reason many observed employees were not wearing the correct gloves was due to a purchasing decision. The site would place purchases for just enough gloves for each worker. They would then run out with an accompanying delay between the purchase and arrival time. How effective would reminders and coaching be in this situation?

The often forgotten part

Coaching for new safety habits and perception influence is critical to sustained excellence in safety performance. In fact, I have dedicated my life and career to such endeavors that create the reality of 100-percent safe all day, at work and away. If used correctly, BBS is an excellent process all companies, when ready, can benefit from. However, we must remember BBS is a process in safety, not the process for safety. Experience has taught me most people are trying to do their best to get the job done injury-free. Our job is to not only coach them but also proactively identify the obstacles and barriers that make it difficult or impossible to do so. Only then can we ensure sustainable success in culture and performance.

Shawn M. Galloway is the president of ProAct Safety, an international safety excellence firm. Galloway is also the host of the acclaimed weekly podcast series, "Safety Culture Excellence."

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NEWS **UPDATE**

ConocoPhillips, OU join forces on biocorrosion challenge

NORMAN, Okla. — The University of Oklahoma (OU) has joined forces with the Upstream Drilling and Production section of ConocoPhillips to create a new Biocorrosion Center within the OU Institute for Energy and Environment.

The center will give OU researchers an opportunity to work closely with ConocoPhillips to develop new technologies to manage biocorrosion in the nation's pipelines, storage facilities, separators, tankers and refineries.

ConocoPhillips will provide start-up funding for the center, but other major oil companies and entities will be invited to participate in the financial support of these efforts. Researchers will explore the fundamental scientific issues that lead to new knowledge, understanding and technology for the diagnosis, mitigation and prevention of biocorrosion problems and fuel biodeterioration.

Joseph Suflita, center director, said he is pleased to collaborate with ConocoPhillips to bring the talents of OU to bear on the relatively poorly understood, but critically important issue of biocorrosion in the oil and gas sector.

One of the leading causes of hazardous material discharges to the environment is the corrosive failure of energy equipment. This is the same infrastructure relied on for the transport of next generation fuels.

Suflita said, "We must explore ways to maintain the integrity of equipment and prevent environmental releases in the first place."

"While there are many corrosion centers around the world, there are few that specifically focus on the role of microorganisms in corrosion processes and none that have as much expertise in the study of anaerobic microorganisms," said Gary Jenneman, corrosion management supervisor at ConocoPhillips.

For more information about the OU Biocorrosion Center, contact Dr. Joseph Suflita at (405) 325-5761 or visit www.ou.edu. ●

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