



## S.T.E.P.S.

### (Strategic Targets for Excellent Performance in Safety)

**T**hrough the years, a variety of programs have been utilized to improve safety, increase employee involvement and create a viable safety culture. Most programs and processes address some aspects of safety while neglecting others. Some of the more recent offerings, such as behavior-based safety (BBS) and all its offshoots have required additional organizational structures, significant amounts of training and virtual bureaucracies to handle the process data. More recently, a new process called STEPS has emerged. A STEPS process can

needs to be able to speak the same language and use the same process to improve safety.

#### THE FIRST STEP

The first basic skill of STEPS is the identification and prioritization of safety-improvement opportunities or "targets." Unlike a BBS process, STEPS can target either behaviors or conditions, or combinations of the two. The safety committee selects early targets from analysis of past incidents and near misses or from observation data if the site has a BBS process. The methodology for identification and prioritization of targets quickly can be learned and immediately implemented. Since STEPS works on only one target at a time, everyone quickly is focused and working on improvement.

Many improvement initiatives don't have a set methodology for targeting specific improvements or for accomplishing them. A good STEPS process specifies methods for removing risks, controlling risks or for increasing the awareness of risks, and for teaching workers to take adequate precautions around risks that cannot be adequately removed or controlled. STEPS focuses on quick wins, and early experiments indicate that the process is capable of accomplishing them. These quick wins tend to create inertia for the process and win over the

A new safety management process is designed to fit into existing structure and facilitate the selection and accomplishment of basic units of safety improvement.

potentially accomplish all these objectives without the necessity for any of the additional (and costly) structural or training-related baggage.

The organizational structure for STEPS is a well-designed site safety committee. Such a committee should involve employees from every level in the organization who should provide a good representation of the various jobs, areas and safety issues in the facility. These are the people already trying to improve safety. STEPS simply will give them better methodology and metrics for doing so. If a site does not have a safety committee, or if the makeup of an existing committee is not ideal, one can be created or modified, and doing so will make improvements even before STEPS is implemented.

The foundation of STEPS involves getting the safety committee and then the rest of the site on the same page as to the definition of safety, how to improve it and the terminology involved in safety-improvement strategies. Having a common vision and methodology is key. Everyone



skeptics who doubted whether or not the process could succeed.

To ensure continued involvement and maintain the inertia of the process, it is critical to share improvement data often with everyone at the site. This might mean the creation of new communication media or methods and almost always necessitates the use of all existing media. In a good STEPS process, everyone knows the goals and methods and tracks the progress toward success. Once a target is set and improvement is accomplished, the communication of the success and of the new target keep the progress moving.

**METRICS**

Metrics in a STEPS process are relatively simple compared to other programs and processes. The tracking of the single-item targeted action plan is supplemented with data about how the plan is impacting risk awareness,

conditional change or new controls. As the plan progresses, it should impact incidents and near misses in the targeted category. The combination of metrics on action items, their impact on the site and the overall impact on lagging indicators teaches those involved exactly how to improve safety outcomes through defined processes, each of which has a metric. Learning this “cause-and-effect” process in safety increases both effectiveness and the sense of control over accidents within the safety culture.

STEPS also simplifies the use of incentives and rewards by dividing all safety efforts into basic units of accomplishment. These units contain goals for improvement and excellent opportunities to reward accomplishment without the traps and contingencies of many traditional carrot-and-stick motivational strategies. The safety culture directly is affected by the STEPS process as the work force learns the basic methodology of setting and ac-

complishing goals as a group. Visible accomplishment becomes the motivation and virtually eliminates the need for outdated and problematic incentive programs. All this is achieved without the need for new consultants, new programs, new training, new committees, new metrics or new support strategies every time the focus changes.

The key to safety culture excellence involves working on the right things (the highest-impact items), the right-sized projects (not too much at a time) and working on them the right way (utilizing effective problem-solving techniques). STEPS encompasses these objectives and can be used to accomplish any safety-improvement goal and become the culture’s process for success.

There is an old Chinese proverb that states that even a journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single step. A STEPS process gets the right people working on the right things with the right tools at the right pace keeping track of their progress with the right metrics. Few safety programs or methods address all these aspects. If you do this process well, it can get you the kind of safety results you can take pride in, as well as create the kind of safety culture that will help you sustain your new level of excellent safety performance.

Experimentation with beta sites for STEPS is still in the early stages. Some sites are doing STEPS in lieu of BBS, some are replacing stalled BBS processes and others are converting mature BBS processes to STEPS. The final verdict is not completely in, but indicators are good that this process can move an organization easily and cost-effectively toward safety culture excellence, one “step” at a time. **EHS**

*Terry L. Mathis is the founder and CEO of ProAct Safety, and is named this month as one of the 50 Most Influential EHS Leaders by EHS TODAY. As an international expert and safety culture practitioner, he has worked with hundreds of organizations customizing innovative approaches to achieve and sustain safety culture excellence. He has spoken at numerous conferences and is a regular presenter at NSC, ASSE PDC and ASSE Seminar-Fest. He can be reached at 800-395-1347 or info@proactsafety.com.*

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