

Why Incentive-Based Safety Programs Work -- Helpful Advice on How to Start

Key issues to consider when designing incentive based safety programs.

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The Bulova Story

Bulova Corporation, one of the nation's largest manufacturers of clocks and watches, has developed several "how-to" guides for effectively using incentives. One is "How to Run a Money-Saving Safety Program."

The guide provides helpful advice on justifying the cost of a program, defining goals, developing the program, building the budget, administering the program, selecting awards and promoting the campaign. The guide also has a budget worksheet plus the packet includes a program worksheet and participant survey.

"The proper use of safety incentive programs for improved safety records and behavior on the job can help you reduce the cost of workers' compensation premiums, but more importantly, they motivate," says Spencer Toomey, Bulova's vice president of Special Markets. "We developed this specific safety program how-to guide along with several others to equip companies with the fuel for launching a successful performance improvement program. Incentives work."

Five Issues To Keep In Mind

Before the launch, however, Bulova has determined these five issues to keep in mind when planning or upgrading an incentive safety program.

1. Physical Environment

Incentives are appropriate and effective only after dangers in the physical environment have been eliminated.

2. Timing

Safety programs should correspond to peak injury periods rather than the calendar year. Most accidents occur close to deadlines and during a company's busy season. If a company is busiest in November and December, kicking off a program in January serves little purpose.

3. Different Hazard Levels

It's easier for employees in administrative positions to avoid mishaps in comparison to those who work with machinery. Recognize this difference and assign hazard levels for program participants. The higher the level the better the award.

4. Accident-Free Days

Safety programs usually emphasize lost-time accidents. This program design is the most tangible and easily understood by employees. However, there are problems with this approach. For instance, if management bases awards solely on accident rates, employees may underreport injuries. Also, this type of program can be very demotivating. If an accident occurs two days shy of the six-month goal, employees may feel all the hard work of the previous months was a waste.

5. Complacency

Employees have to be reminded of safety issues regularly. Every few months focus on a different workplace hazard and celebrate each milestone.