

Commercial Safety Management Systems

While I will not name them because of the risk of litigation I have had experience with the following commercial safety management systems-

- 1 About 3 years implementing an international system
- 2 A lesser involvement implementing another international system
- 3 A lesser involvement in implementing 3 Australian systems

The following are my observations on the above systems-

They usually lock you into having audits with their auditors at considerable cost

Some lock you into specified training with their trainers at considerable cost

One international system was socially and culturally unsuited to Australia and was a disaster

All have theoretically good elements for having a good approach to safety but are different and lack a focus on severe personal damage

All adopt a standardised approach where it is difficult to accommodate the unique identified needs of organisations

Lag indicators of safety performance rather than lead indicators tend to be used.

My experience is that some have had poor quality auditors

Generally costs are high

All suffer from the deficiency of lacking a focus on the Class 1 personal damage occurrence phenomenon.

Discussion

Focus on Class 1 personal damage and use this in considerations of analysis. Class 1 damage is that which permanently alters the future of the individual. Minor injuries are not a good predictor of more serious personal damage. Taxonomies (collections of like) of your industry personal damage occurrences provide better guidance than enterprise experience. Critical incident recall can be another very powerful tool to guide your prevention efforts.

What you do in safety must be based on the personal damage occurrence phenomenon. Use personal damage occurrences, not emotion, to guide your preventative efforts. Beware of the many fads that crop up from time to time in safety, they are usually emotionally appealing but may misdirect your efforts. My mentor, Geoff McDonald uses the term displacement activity, a displacement activity is something we do, something we put a lot of energy into, but when we examine it closely there is no valid reason to do it. The history of the industrial safety movements has had, and continues to have many displacement activities.

Recommendations

1 Be guided by taxonomies of class 1 personal damage in your industry

2 Spend the money that would go to a commercial provider developing a system unique to your identified needs, identify training needs and train appropriately using modern adult learning principles, train your own auditors and conduct your own audits (If a demand for external accreditation arises you should have no reservations if you have done a thorough job) Details of some of the commercial systems are available by various means, pick the most appropriate elements out of these.

The above approach keeps developed expertise in house, promotes buy in and results in an approach more targeted at your unique needs provided it is done properly.