

## **Setting Safety Goals**

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Setting safety goals can be complicated. Often we think that personal injuries and property damage just “happens” and, therefore, safety is out of our control. But, when it comes to setting goals for safety, we get stuck. Is having *no* injuries or *no property* losses a realistic goal? Do we merely rely on claims management to manage safety and leave accident avoidance to Fate?

This may be difficult to believe, but reducing personal injuries is possible, and realistic; some companies have taken the issue head-on and improved workplace safety culture by setting goals and involving all their employees in the process of reducing injuries and property losses. Some companies are always working on it, and they do it by frequently letting their employees know that their safety is important and vital to the success of the company.

One easy way to begin is to start with something that affects everyone, such as driver safety. Right now, distracted driving is a hot safety topic but this is not a new topic distracted driving has been a concern for decades, but in the past few years it seems to have gotten out of control. We see it every time we get behind the wheel: someone is texting or talking on their cell phone. Talking on cell phones even hands free may not be the riskiest thing we do while driving, but cell phones are involved in most distracted driving crashes.

Distracted driving is a cultural issue and nothing more illustrates the behavioral cultural safety issue than texting while driving. It doesn't take long before you hear that a young driver has been killed while texting and driving. Somehow they thought that they would be the exception, that they won't be injured or killed if they just sent out a quick text. How long can it take to send out a quick text, maybe, 4 seconds? Consider this, a car traveling 50 MPH travels 75 feet per second or 300 feet in four second. How much damage can you inflict in four seconds if you are not paying attention?

So, one of your goals is pretty straightforward: talk to your employees about paying attention to the task at hand when they are behind the wheel. It is also equally important to talk to your employees about paying attention to other distracted drivers and avoid contact with them; know who and where they are and be on your guard. If you are in need of an actual story to make it real think about using the Michael Phelps story. Michael was a school principal in Allenstown NH who lost his life when a distracted driver hit him. The video shows the devastating consequences of distracted driving from the perspective of a family who lost their loved one and the person who was responsible for the deadly crash. <http://www.tiffanyeddy.com/news/videos/>

Another issue is seatbelt compliance. Not every driver wears a seatbelt, so begin with motor vehicle operation in a broad sense, making drivers more aware of their own mortality and the real possibility of losing their life or becoming physically impaired as a result of a vehicle collision. Of course, we don't think that our actions will cause a collision, but the chances are good that somebody else's actions will. And none of us thinks we'll be involved in a motor vehicle collision that will put us in a wheelchair for the rest of our lives, or worse, kill us.

### **What are OUR plans?**

We all have plans; plans for the evening after work, plans for the weekend or a holiday, and vacation plans. All of these plans assume our good health and even that we will still be alive, but certainly none of us seriously consider that we won't be around to enjoy the fulfillment of these plans.

Motor vehicle collisions are the single largest cause of American workplace fatalities. This is a fact, yet so few drivers really consider that their life is on the line when they drive, except the professional driver, perhaps. For the rest, that is one reason why they don't wear seatbelts. The voluntary decision to violate commonly accepted rules is another manifestation of the belief that one will be

the exception, that one will *not* get caught, that the catastrophic collision won't happen to me.

### **Regulating Safety**

OSHA and DOT (FMCSA) have collaborated on this important matter. OSHA, under the provision of its General Duty Clause (which states that an employer must remedy or take steps to remedy a potential workplace safety condition if the condition is recognized as a threat to employee safety) has ruled that a motor vehicle cab is a "workplace." Therefore, anything a driver does behind the wheel is under the jurisdiction of the company and the company has to take measures that will ensure a driver's safety.

Mandating seatbelt use (enforcing the rule) and banning cell phone use and texting while driving, along with other common distractions, is expected. If you don't have an enforceable policy to cover this, it should become one of your safety goals. Do you have a policy on speeding? What are your expectations?

If the policy is not enforced, then THAT becomes your policy.

Making safe vehicle operation a priority will make a difference. Companies that have followed this course have reduced their rear end collisions due to their vehicles following too closely, have reduced backing collisions, have reduced the incidence of slipping and falling from entering or exiting the cab of a truck because they have insisted on drivers using the 3-point technique. Make drivers more aware of their mortality; it works.

### **Setting Goals**

So, do we *really* need to take the time to remind our employees that they should be careful? Are there workplace signs and reminders that safety is important to the company? Maybe *that* should be a goal in your company.

Perhaps reducing a specific type of injury should be a goal. Maybe the injuries are minor cuts that can be reasonably expected in the course of work. Begin with an *attainable* goal of reduction, such as a specific percentage, but leave room for further reduction. Be realistic.

Another goal is broader in scope: increase safety awareness by talking to your employees frequently. Touch on subjects that everyone relates to. Remind drivers why seatbelts are required, not just because it is a law for commercial vehicle operators; alert them to the dangers of texting while driving, eating while driving, and reading while driving...they'll probably agree with you. Make that connection. But, remember: chances are that the new and less experienced driver probably thinks he or she can handle it.

It has been said that "safety is no accident." Each of us employs a certain level of safety awareness and while some think personal injuries are "accidents," safety in the workplace demands that everyone plays a part in injury avoidance. Set a goal (or goals) for your company, and then get everyone to "buy into" the process.

Make **safety** your company's "business as usual."