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Marketing strategies for enhancing safety culture

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Abstract

Promotional and marketing strategies can be effective tools for raising and maintaining the profile of occupational health and safety (OHS) within an organization. It is important to maximize the impact of health and safety promotions, and to ensure a consistent, desired message is conveyed. When developing OHS promotional campaigns, consideration should be given to identifying the target audience and the objective of the campaign. The aim is to keep employees focused in a positive and proactive way. Effective communication brings together people, processes, and systems. The challenge is to promote health and safety throughout all levels of the organization, and to find effective strategies such as published materials, displays, media, training and the Internet, to gain management commitment and employee involvement in the decision-making and problem-solving processes which are essential for achieving a positive safety culture. The benefits can go beyond lowering the lost time injury rate, and can include economic and social gains.

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1. Introduction

Many organizations are doing excellent work to improve their occupational health and safety (OHS) systems but fail to capitalize on the promotional opportunity that this presents. They tend to focus their OHS promotion strategies on displaying the number of days since the last lost time injury (Creek, 1995). This only measures the output of the system and may give a false sense of security leading to a reactive approach to OHS (Earnst, 1997).

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Research has identified that management commitment to OHS, and employee empowerment and involvement in OHS, are key aspects of safety culture (Shaw and Blewitt, 1996, Peterson in Dougherty, 1997). The result is employees with proactive attitudes and behaviours towards OHS which leads to better management of risk, and the overall reduction of illness, injury and property damage. Improvements in OHS arise through physical improvements in the work environment, procedures and systems that allow continuous safety improvements, knowledge factors, and improvements in workplace safety culture (Griffiths, 2001). Miller (1998) recommends that organizations should have adequate OHS management systems and engineering controls in place before steps are taken to improve workplace culture. It is proposed that organizations that are genuinely committed to OHS and are making good progress with implementing physical improvements and management systems, can begin to improve the safety culture by promoting the improvements. The rewards for campaigning more broadly can include improvement in the investigation and documentation of incidents, better risk assessments and job safety procedures, and winning contracts because of the safety systems and culture in place (Vecchio-Sadus, 2000, 2001, 2002a).

This paper illustrates how companies can use OHS marketing strategies to influence behaviour and to promote management commitment and employee empowerment to enhance safety culture. CSIRO Minerals (Australia) is used as a case study of a research and development (R&D) organization with a diverse set of risk factors.

2. CSIRO Minerals

2.1. Working environment

CSIRO Minerals is part of CSIRO which is Australia's government R&D organization. CSIRO Minerals conducts R&D in mineral processing and metal production. The working environment differs from most other businesses. It ranges from office-based work, to sophisticated laboratories, to highly technical pilot plants. Consequently, the hazards are more variable than in many industrial workplaces, and changeable. Some of the workforce view safety as an administrative impediment to carrying out the science. However, the work environment includes hazardous materials and processes that necessitate the consideration of health and safety at the outset of a project. Particular hazards at CSIRO Minerals include chemicals and hazardous substances, radioactive materials, gases, electrical, plant and machinery, and high temperatures and pressures.

CSIRO Minerals has approximately 300 employees. More than 75% have tertiary qualifications as chemists, physicists, and engineers (the 'scientists'). The remainder serve as administrators including finance and marketing. The gender distribution is 77% male to 23% female. The age distribution is 46% for staff aged 20–39 years, and 54% for staff aged 40 years and above. Each employee is assigned a classification level ranging from 1 to 9. Unqualified employees are assigned to levels 1–2. The entry

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