



## Cleaning Right Means Cleaning Safe

Make safety competitive and document, document.

By Deborah L. Moore

This year, over 60,000 janitors and other cleaning staff members will be injured on their jobs. Will your facility play a part in this statistic? Research conducted by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) identified the following variables related to disproportionately higher shares of on-the-job injuries and illnesses:

- \* **Age.** Younger employees have more on-the-job accidents.
- \* **Time on the job.** New employees have more accidents and injuries.
- \* **Size of the facility.** In general, medium-sized companies have more accidents and work-related injuries than smaller or larger companies.

A poor safety program exposes your facility to an increase in potential worker injury, OSHA fines, workers' compensation costs, and possible company and personal supervisory liability for an employee's accident. A commitment to a safe workplace should result from (besides the threat of OSHA inspections and fines) a desire to decrease costs, increase employee morale and better train workers.

A strong safety and health program will increase the productivity of your operation -- as well as decrease workplace accidents. Direct costs which will be lower include workers' compensation premiums, medical payments and insurance deductibles. Indirect costs associated with workplace injuries -- which may many times exceed direct costs -- include production down time, loss of employee morale and efficiency, hiring and training replacements for injured workers, damage to products and equipment, and loss of reputation with customers.

While improved safety and health is an incentive unto itself, this does not always motivate employees to make changes in their work habits. Sometimes it is necessary for employers to sweeten the pot to make "safe cleaning" attractive to employees.

Some facilities have contests among employees for the most time worked without an accident. First prize can be a gift certificate at a local restaurant of a meal brought into work by the employer for the winning team. Consider creating a "Safest Employee of the Week" award.

## **Veteran Employees, Too**

Ask your supplier sales rep to host a workshop training employees on the products they use. This training will help cut down on the risk of injuries and is a good refresher course for employees who have been using the products for years. Providing successful completion certificates to employees who attended the workshop can be a morale-booster.

Encourage your senior staff and supervisors to take as many safety-related courses as possible. If an incident occurs, they will be better prepared to handle the situation.

Re-evaluate your chemical inventory. There are now many effective products on the market which pose less of a health risk to employees and others than some of the more aggressive products that have been in use for years. For example, consider switching from an acid-based bathroom cleaner to one with a lower percentage of acid, one containing a more "user-friendly" acid or one without acid.

Back injuries are the most frequent on-the-job injuries. Consider providing employees with back support belts. Belts alone do not prevent injuries, but they remind the wearers of the correct lifting position of the back.

Review the material safety data sheets (MSDS) for your products and list the personal protective equipment (PPE) that is required for each product. Having ample PPE on hand eliminates any problems with employees refusing to perform their jobs because there are not enough gloves or goggles in stock. Dispose of any equipment that is not in good shape.

Have on hand a blood spill cleanup kit, and arrange for a training session for you and your employees to review proper blood and bodily fluid cleanup procedures.

## **On to HAZCOM**

OSHA now requires that you conduct a hazard assessment to identify, organize and analyze sources of on-the-job hazards. If such hazards exist, the employer must select the proper PPE for employees.

Employees must be trained in the use, limitations and proper maintenance of PPE. The employer is required to document the training with a written certification that includes the employees' names, training dates and subjects covered in the training session. Many companies have employees sign a copy of this document.

Lack of a site-specific written hazard communication (HAZCOM) program has been the number one OSHA violation for the last several years. A written HAZCOM program would include the following information:

\* Hazard communication policy tailored to the facility

- \* List of hazardous chemicals at the facility
- \* MSDS and product labels used at the facility
- \* Employee training and information
- \* Performance of non-routine tasks
- \* Contractor/employer notification of products brought onto the facility by other companies.

HAZCOM training is required before a new employee begins work and should be performed annually or whenever new hazards arise. Temporary employees and summer help must also be trained. It applies to any facility which requires employees to handle hazardous materials on the job, regardless of its size or number of employees.

### **When OSHA Calls...**

During an OSHA inspection, employees are frequently interviewed and must demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the OSHA compliance officer, adequate knowledge of the chemicals they are working with, proper procedures to follow when handling them and the ability to put into practice what they have learned.

OSHA has cautioned employers that a generic "one size fits all" videotape training program or book is not considered effective training. Job hazards and chemicals used at each specific site must be covered and understood by all employees.

MSDS for the products used on the job must be readily available to all employees, who must be familiar with how to read and interpret MSDS for the products they handle or are exposed to. There must be an MSDS for every chemical in use at the facility, regardless of where the product was purchased. Even sample products must be accompanied by an MSDS. If you're unable to obtain the MSDS from the vendor, contact the manufacturer directly.

Programs for other issues may also pertain to your operation: lockout/tagout; confined space entry; forklifts; and the OSHA Form 200 accident and illness log.

As a cleaning/maintenance manager, you are familiar with the risks and hazards of your facility, and are responsible for protecting your workers. These suggestions may benefit your facility through less lost worktime due to injury, decreased insurance costs and the satisfaction of having a safer, healthier workplace.

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