

# Creating a Successful Departmental Injury and Illness Prevention Program

Your Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP) is in place. You've met Cal/OSHA's regulations and your employees understand their responsibilities to help keep the workplace safe. You're also ready to present your IIPP the next time a Cal/OSHA inspector drops by for a visit. Now it's time to bring your safety plan to the next level.

Creating a successful IIPP doesn't stop with meeting the Cal/OSHA regulation. This is a living document that spells out to your employees how you intend to keep them safe and productive on the job. It also spells out how you work to prevent workplace injuries and the costs—both direct and indirect—that come with those injuries.

So how do you create a successful IIPP? We offer six steps to get you there:

## 1. Involve your employees

They know the job better than anyone else and can provide valuable information to you. They may be aware of a hazard that you did not know about and could have a solution. They'll also feel more appreciated and valued. Form a safety committee with your employees and show them how to review the IIPP. Regular committee meetings also allow them to discuss concerns and potential hazards on a regular basis.

When your workers are involved in setting up your IIPP, they take ownership of the plan. They also feel more valued and appreciated, which leads to better morale. Some may even want to lead safety meetings or coach coworkers on how to stay safe on the job. Better morale can also mean improved retention rates, fewer absences, and higher productivity.

## 2. Upper management leads by example

You may have heard the phrase "if you talk the talk, you must walk the walk." For smaller organizations, make sure you understand what's in your IIPP and follow it. For larger organizations, you might need to get your leadership team together to review the IIPP and make sure everyone understands it and agrees to follow it.

The last thing you want is for your employees to see you violating the safety processes you and they worked so hard to put in place. First, that can damage morale. Second, you'd be sending a message that rules aren't important. This could lead to more injuries, illnesses, claims, and costs for your business. So, during this Covid-19 time, if

you need to enter an area or workspace where masks are required, make sure to wear the mask even if you'll be there for only a few minutes.

### **3. Clearly define responsibilities and accountability for supervisors**

Supervisors, including the foreperson and site leads, have key responsibilities for every element of the IIPP. This includes providing proper training so employees know how to do the job safely.

If supervisors don't monitor for compliance with safe work practices and correct unsafe behavior when they observe it, employees will start to ignore the safety rules put in place for their protection. If supervisors don't encourage two-way communication during safety meetings, employees won't feel their input is appreciated or valued and they will stop caring about the success of the program. If supervisors prioritize production goals and meeting deadlines over doing the job safely, then employees can get hurt.

To employees, supervisors are the most visible reflection of the safety culture of the organization. Just like it is for upper management, remind your supervisors also to lead by example.

### **4. Investigate all accidents and near-miss incidents**

One of the best predictors of a future workplace injury is one that has already happened or one that almost happened (near miss). Thoroughly investigate all workplace accidents and near misses and involve your employees too. They can provide a unique perspective as to why something happened. Being on the front line, employees can witness accidents.

Your investigation should always dig down to the root cause or causes of the accident or near miss. Sure, an employee might have taken a shortcut to get the job done. But, there may also have been a malfunction in a piece of equipment that wasn't caught, or a safety precaution that wasn't in place yet. And, always investigate a near miss the same way you would for a workplace injury. You might be able to identify a hazard and make changes before someone gets hurt.

### **5. Recordkeeping**

Documentation is a critical part of your safety plan. Any time there is an accident or near miss, you need to establish records of what happened. This includes:

- What the investigation revealed
- Corrective actions

- Disciplinary actions
- Training recommendations or changes
- Other prevention steps

You can use the records of any accident or identification of a new hazard to update your policies and procedures as well as your IIPP. And, you can incorporate these matters into new hire training so that the next generation of employees at your workplace can also learn them, even though they weren't around at the time an incident occurred. You can also reference the past while training your employees on how to perform tasks the right and safe way from the start.

## **6. Review and update**

According to Cal/OSHA, a regular review and updating your IIPP is how you keep it effective. One best practice is to review it at least once per year and anytime you discover new hazards in the workplace.

This process allows you to double and triple check to ensure employees are still following your procedures. And, you can verify that corrective actions put in place after previous investigations are still there. Check to see if there are any new processes, jobsites, or company functions that are not yet reflected in the current program.

Having an IIPP that meets Cal/OSHA regulations puts you in compliance with the state and helps you avoid citations. Having a successful IIPP helps you take workplace safety to the next level, where employees are involved in establishing and maintaining a safe workplace. When employees take a lead role in important matters like workplace safety, other members of the staff will follow their lead.

Follow these 6 steps for a successful IIPP that also helps your bottom line!