

FIVE STEPS FOR CREATING A NEW TRAINING PROGRAM



Every company is unique when it comes to their location, industry, and people, which means that there is no “one-size-fits-all” training solution. While there are some general safety concerns which affects all workplaces (fire and severe weather, for instance), safety is not as simple as knowing where the emergency exits are in your building. To build a sustainable positive safety culture, you need to implement a compliant, effective training program which is tailored specifically based on your work environment and employee’s needs. A positive safety culture is personal, so it is important to involve employees when you are creating a safety training program. To do this, you must complete the following five steps:

Step 1: Evaluate the Needs of Your Organization

Before a training program can be implemented, or even designed, you need to have a thorough understanding of the types of training that are necessary for your organization. This will require research through various means: observation of processes, interviews of workers in the company, finding the local, state, and federal laws, ordinances, and regulations pertaining to your industry, and reviewing the training (formal or informal) which is currently taking place. It is also important to interview the workers to understand what their needs are instead of assuming that all the needs are already identified by previous incidents.

Answering the following list of questions can provide you with information on your company’s training needs. Some are self-explanatory, if a regulation requires training, your program needs to include it. Others require further consideration. If your organization has employees who aren’t proficient in English, will they require training materials in other languages, or require language classes to communicate effectively in emergency situations? You may even think of other questions that should be addressed, as well, when auditing the safety needs of your company.

1. What hazards are present in our workplace?
2. Do employees work with machinery? Electricity? Radiation? Chemicals? Confined Spaces?
3. What emergency plans does our company have in place for fire? Severe weather? Workplace violence? Medical emergencies?
4. Which federal regulations or OSHA standards apply to our industry?
5. Which federal regulations or OSHA standards apply to the hazards present in our workplace?
6. What local regulations apply to our industry or hazards present in our workplace?
7. What state regulations apply to our industry or hazards present in our workplace?
8. How will we demonstrate compliance with safety standards?
9. What is our budget for safety training?
10. How much time is needed to perform safety training?
11. What training programs do we already use? How effective are they?
12. What other training, besides safety training, do our employees need?
13. What training do new hires need?
14. Do any employees require specialized or job-specific safety training?
15. Does our company use any equipment which requires special training?
16. Do we have any employees who drive as part of their job responsibilities?
17. Which types of incidents or injuries have occurred in our workplace in the past?
18. What are the most common workplace a or regulation violations generally?
19. Have we ever received citations or been in violation of safety regulations? Which ones?
20. Do we have non-English speaking employees? What is their English proficiency?
21. What environmental regulations apply to our industry and operations?
22. What personal protective equipment (PPE) is required for our processes?
23. Ask employees what topic should be added if they were responsible for training their friends and family.
24. Ask employees for ways to improve current training.

Step 2: Set Objectives for the Training Program

Once you have collected information on the training needs of your company, you can then use that information to determine the objectives of your safety program. One of the goals of all safety programs is legal compliance, this goal is arguably secondary to ensuring employee safety and well-being. Setting measurable, specific objectives for your new training program is the best way to meet both of those overarching goals.

Example training program goals:

Comply with all relevant local, state, and federal regulations.

Reduce overall workplace incidents by ##%.

Reduce occurrences of [common injury claim in your workplace] by ##%.

Lose 0 productive hours due to safety issue-related downtime.

Have 100% participation and on-time completion of required training.

All of these goals can serve as metrics for evaluating the efficacy of your safety training program, once it is in use. They are also useful in determining the types of training that workers will need.

Step 3: Selecting the Training Topics

The combination of the safety goals you've instated and the information on hazards, standards, and other factors which affect your organization will help you select the training topics that your program must include. For instance, if you've determined through your evaluation that your company uses forklifts, and that OSHA mandates training on the use of powered industrial trucks, you know that employees authorized to use this equipment require training on it. If the most common incident in your workplace is employees falling off of ladders, and one of the goals of your training program is to reduce falls from ladders, your program should include ladder safety and fall protection.

For your training program to be effective, it needs to be thorough and keep employees engaged so be sure to include training topics on all potential hazards (mechanical, electrical, chemical, etc.) and regulations which affect your company. Don't ignore the obvious. It might seem like common knowledge that one shouldn't handle corrosive chemicals without chemical-resistant gloves, but nothing can be taken for granted. Also, don't ignore the seemingly harmless; there are hazards in every workplace, even an air-conditioned office. Employees will be more engaged if they understand that keeping each other safe impacts more than their life at work.

Step 4: Determine How Training Will Be Conducted and Recorded

Once you've chosen the topics to train on, you'll need to decide how training will occur. Will you schedule classroom training sessions, or will you find an online training platform? Classroom training is the traditional training method, and ensures that training is completed all at one time, but it can be expensive, lengthy, and disruptive to the workflow. Online training systems allow users to train anywhere, at any time; production isn't halted for the day while everyone is sitting in a classroom. As long as the necessary technology is available, and workers have the computer skills to take the online courses, online training is a viable training solution.

It may be useful to create a training schedule that clearly defines how often employees will be trained on each topic. Some courses may require only a refresher every year, while some may require retraining every 24 or 36 months to meet OSHA standards. A protocol should also be put in place for retraining after critical safety violations or incidents occur.

Step 4: Determine How Training Will Be Conducted and Recorded *(continued...)*

To comply with government regulations, your company will need to keep records of training that have been completed. What system will your organization employ to organize training records? Traditionally, organizations have used sign-off sheets and certificates to demonstrate that employees have satisfactorily completed the required training. Many digital learning management systems keep training records automatically within the system, and some even generate reports, which may be useful for your company. When determining how records will be kept, it's important to consider how often the records will be accessed, and by whom. You need to be capable of presenting training records just in case of an OSHA audit, or will department managers need information on which of their employees has completed training on a regular basis for follow-up? These considerations can affect the method and location for storing these records.


Step 5: Start Training

When all of the previous steps have been completed, you're ready to put the new training system into action. Everyone in your organization needs to be committed to safety and the success of this training initiative, so it's vital that you stress the importance of safety to the physical, mental, and emotional health of every individual working within the company, as well as to the health of the company as a whole, including its ability to attract and retain talent, avoid costly lawsuits and fines, and increase profits. You may want to conduct training exercises for each individual to think about why safety is important to them as an individual. How would their life change if they experienced a serious injury? How would it impact their co-workers or loved ones? Get that commitment and then start getting people trained.

Make sure that everyone knows what the new training program entails, and what it requires of them as employees. If you're implementing e-training, verify that everyone can log into and navigate the system. Create a training matrix that shows which employees and positions require which training and when, and schedule it accordingly.

Use this beginning period of training system implementation as a beta testing session: collect information on how it's working and what changes, if any, need to be made. Talk to employees at all levels of the organization for feedback. While you might get some responses saying that the training isn't their favorite thing to do, you might also receive some useful constructive criticism. Maybe someone will notice a gap in training topics or identify where hazard identification is needed in your building, which you can then integrate into the new program.

Creating and implementing a new training program, especially if you're not an expert in safety, can be a massive and challenging task. Following these guidelines and involving your employees can make the process a little easier and hopefully leave you with a training system that actually works for your organization.



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