

Are we Safe Yet?

By Jim Lark, DCMA Safety and Occupational Health Division

Editor's note: The summer 2007 issue of Communicator introduced the people and key functions of the Defense Contract Management Agency Human Resources Safety and Occupational Health Division. This follow-up article explains one of those functions in detail — program evaluations at DCMA contract management offices.

The protection DCMA's SOH Program affords employees should be consistent agency-wide. Geographic location, product group alignment and local conditions should not essentially affect local program management. CMOs should be in step with one another. The SOH division personnel make every effort to support and promote that consistency.

One of the key tools the division uses is the formal program evaluation. The expectation is that the safety manager of each product group will evaluate the CMOs in the group annually, particularly where a commander or director leads the staff. The regularity in the schedule preserves program consistency across the agency and, as an added benefit, keeps the safety managers personally in touch with local issues and concerns.

Once fundamental areas are covered, the safety manager proceeds to consideration of the local management of 18 discrete elements in the overall safety and occupational health program — for example, the emergency action plan, ergonomics and office safety.

Use of a checklist and a formal set of questions that each safety manager asks during every evaluation ensures program consistency. The entire SOH staff has helped fashion these questions. The evaluating safety manager clears visit dates with the commander or director and with the collateral duty safety advocate well in advance of the evaluation. The Human Resources Labor and Employee Relations Division also invites union officials to take part.

After an opening conference, the safety manager looks first for indications of overall safety awareness. Accompanied by the collateral duty safety advocate, the safety manager hopes to find that the collateral duty safety advocate has a letter of appointment, that the Department of Defense program poster is prominently displayed and that a safety policy statement, as well as safety and health literature, are available and conspicuous.

The next consideration is the local safety committee: who its members are; how often they meet; what



At a contractor facility, the safety manager examines the physical plant, focusing on industrial hazards such as unguarded shafts and belts, speeding forklifts, electrical hazards, stairways and platforms without railings, open containers of flammable liquids and locked exits. (Photo courtesy of iStockphoto.com)

Data meeting the checklist requirements are rated 100 percent.

Data not meeting standards get a rating of less than 100 percent;

how much less depends on circumstances.

they discuss; what actions they take; and how effective they are. Then, training is the next focus. The team examines how well all command members — leadership, supervisors and line employees — are educated for their roles in mishap prevention.

Once fundamental areas are covered, the safety manager proceeds to consideration of the local management of 18 discrete elements in the overall safety and occupational health program — for example, the emergency action plan, ergonomics and office safety.

To evaluate office safety, the safety manager looks for workplace hazards. Most frequently, problems exist near emergency egress areas or in fire prevention, supply storage or electrical safety practices (particularly errant extension cords). The examination also provides the safety manager with an opportunity to meet individual employees and have personal discussions about safety and occupational health. When the CMO is located at a contractor facility, the examination extends to the physical plant. There, a safety manager focuses on industrial hazards that could affect government employees: unguarded shafts and belts, speeding forklifts, electrical hazards, stairways and

platforms without railings, open containers of flammable liquids and locked exits.

The safety manager notes and scores the information collected. Data meeting the checklist requirements are rated 100 percent. Data not meeting standards get a rating of less than 100 percent; how much less depends on circumstances. For example, according to the rating checklists, supervisors are supposed to review the emergency plan with employees when they are hired, when their responsibilities change in relation to the plan and if the plan itself is changed. If supervisors in an office review the plan with new employees and employees who became first responders but failed to do so again following a reorganization, the rating for the item becomes 67 percent. Ratings for complete elements are also averages. Traffic safety, for instance, has seven

components. If six of the items are rated at 100 percent but one is rated zero, the overall rating for traffic safety would be 86 percent. Similarly, there is an overall rating; it is the average of the ratings from the fundamental areas and the discrete program elements. This figure reflects the vigor of the entire safety and occupational health program at a CMO.

The safety manager concludes an evaluation by reviewing the findings and proposing corrective actions. Problems identified in a contractor's facilities are made known to the contract administrator for resolution via contractual means.

Finally, for every evaluation there is a report. The safety manager prepares it as quickly as possible. It goes first to the SOH division chief, Lloyd Roberts, and then on to the commander or director of the CMO evaluated.

If you have questions about this process, contact Roberts at Lloyd.Roberts@dcma.mil. 

The Safety Checklist Ratings

An overall rating of 90 percent to 100 percent means that the program is healthy to robust. Perhaps two of 30 workstations need ergonomic assessment and one of five fire extinguishers requires hydrostatic testing. Essentially, however, safety and health are OK.

An average of 70 percent to 89 percent means that a program is in shape but that it has a few notable deficiencies. Perhaps safety shoes are worn out, or a mishap report is incomplete, or there's a need for new

safety posters and pamphlets. Even so, quick fixes will put all to rights.

But 0 percent to 69 percent is a red flag, a storm warning — the program is in trouble and must be remedied. Root causes may be that there is no collateral duty safety advocate, or there is a CDSA but he or she is way overextended and there is no time for safety or multiple program elements have ratings significantly less than 69 percent. In fact, though, such dire findings are unlikely in DCMA.