

# APWA REPORTER

## Minneapolis welcomes APWA's first PWX

*See our special PWX section beginning  
on page 33 and Program on pages 63-110*



# Worksite Safety: Not a one-size-fits-all approach

**Steven T. Adamavich**

Sr. Safety & Health Specialist  
Fehr Graham  
Plymouth, Wisconsin

**M**ost municipalities look to consultants after a safety inspector has found gaps in its safety programs or trainings. Gaps can lead to citations, fines and unsafe working conditions. What most municipalities fail to realize is that truly effective safety programming and training must be customized to meet the specific needs of the workplace. There is no “one-size-fits-all” solution when it comes to safety, and municipalities should avoid using a boilerplate approach when conducting such activities.

## Hard facts

**Studies show that for every \$1 invested in injury prevention, the return on investment runs between \$2 and \$6** (<http://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/10414-the-roi-of-safety>). Clearly, there is a financial case for better safety, but the more important reason is to protect employees from injury or possibly death. Having a customized program provides the employees the best possible information to protect their health and safety. The addition of profit savings is icing on the cake, but many times is at the core of the decision-making process. As evidenced with the statistics provided in the URL above, if the focus stays on the implementation of a focused, specific and custom plan, the financial benefits will follow.

## What can be done?

**Avoid solely relying on safety manuals.** Some websites advertise “safety manuals” and refer to them as “safety programs.” Companies claim their manuals meet the minimum Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements, but they are certainly not safety programs. A safety program includes training, tracking and specific instruction for a facility.

The issue with relying on a basic safety manual is it only answers the question of what to do or not to do. A manual doesn’t create the kind of atmosphere and culture in an organization which reduces accidents. A customized manual starts by providing awareness to the individuals on why safety is important. The steps that will lead to a truly safety-conscious culture are creating consistency, customized instruction, and reinforcement, and incentive to do the right thing when presented with safety decisions. A truly customized program can take an organization to the next level, providing both training and support to improve the overall safety culture.

**Take the proper time and due diligence.** For safety programs, it’s common for consultants to discover simple errors that are typically made when rushing to complete a program. Simple errors can result in violations. For example, when developing a safety program, make sure all portions of the program are complete. Cross-reference to make sure you are correctly identifying all the specifics of the program and don’t leave any spaces blank. Simple errors can indicate to the inspector that the program was not given the proper time and attentiveness, rendering it ineffective.

**Be specific.** Be sure the content in safety programs and trainings is tailored to your specific workplace. Year after year the Control of Hazardous Energy (1910.147 Lockout Tagout – LO/TO) standard makes the top ten most-cited OSHA regulation. Why? In most cases it is because there are no specific



Lockout/Tagout for electrical power source for grinding machinery



procedures written for the equipment. Oftentimes, municipalities have programs that state “we will follow all LO/TO procedures as outlined in the regulations,” but when asked to be shown (for example) “the procedure on how to lockout that conveyor belt,” the response given is: “we don’t have that.”

The first step to writing a solid LO/TO procedure is to reach out to the staff member who knows the equipment best. Although not a daily user of the equipment, the most knowledgeable person usually resides in the maintenance department. They have a much better knowledge of the inner workings and dangers associated with the equipment. Using the maintenance department accomplishes two tasks: gathering staff input and ensuring accuracy.

The next step includes listing the type of energy source (i.e., electrical, hydraulic, pneumatic etc.), magnitude (i.e., volts, psi etc.), whether there is a potential for stored energy, the location of these energy sources (i.e., panel 2B on west wall), and method on how to de-energize the equipment.

Once the above information is gathered, the procedure should be written and verified through actual implementation. After testing, if it creates a zero energy state, the procedure is complete and the organization can proceed with documenting the procedure for the next piece of equipment until all procedures are written.

Although pictures of the energy source location are not necessary, they provide a visual element which assists in identification. Additionally, more municipalities are laminating procedures and placing them on the machine, providing this key

information in the easiest and most accessible location.

**Do not conduct general trainings, but rather incorporate as many specific details as possible.** Below are tips on how to conduct a well-received and informed educational learning experience:

- Keep it concise and to the point. Let’s face it, safety is not a topic that generates a lot of excitement from employees, so keep the training session on task.
- Make sure all employees are aware of the program coordinator and the exact location of the LO/TO equipment.
- List the actual names of the employees authorized to use the equipment and those affected.
- Review group LO/TO and shift change procedures.
- Practice specific procedures. Break the session up into small groups and have all trainees perform LO/TO

on at least one piece of equipment. This requires the employees to use equipment and ensures the procedures are being reviewed. Practicing the procedures also provides an opportunity to ask questions.

- Draw on participants’ own experiences. Nothing keeps a training session more entertaining than talking about near misses.

The above LO/TO example can be followed for every safety issue in any public works facility. Other opportunities included in a comprehensive customized safety plan may include confined spaces, forklift safety and construction site safety. Taking the time to develop site-specific programs and trainings will pay off. The results include cost savings, reduced citations, employee buy-in and, most importantly, a safer workplace.

*Steven T. Adamavich can be reached at (920) 892-2444 or [sadamavich@fehr-gramham.com](mailto:sadamavich@fehr-gramham.com).*



Lock on a pneumatic disconnect as part of a compressed air energy source