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## Encourage Workers to Report Safety and Health Concerns

Workers know all about the equipment, controls, and processes of their workplace. This often puts them in the best place to identify safety and health concerns and point out the shortcomings of the safety and health program. Workers might fear retaliation or ridicule, however, so they need encouragement.

Create a system that encourages workers to report concerns and promptly follow up on all reports. This way, you can address issues before someone gets hurt or sick. Use the information you get from reports when you work on the worksheets for hazard identification.

### To-Do

- Set up a clear reporting process.
- Make sure everyone understands the reporting process and is able to use it.
- Be sure management responds promptly to reports and follows through.

### Set up a system for reporting injuries, illnesses, incidents, and hazards

Gather your team of “safety champions” and design a reporting system. You can work together on a drawing or diagram (for example, on a whiteboard or large piece of paper) that shows the steps and activities. Share this drawing with others to get input and refine it. Then write up the steps to document the process.

#### An Unreported Incident Leads to Serious Injury

When injuries, illnesses, or incidents are not reported, underlying hazards can go unaddressed. Workers are then likely to get hurt in the future. That’s what happened at one food product supplier. A worker noticed a small leak coming from mixing equipment. She wasn’t sure what it was, but her employer didn’t have any clear way for her to report concerns. She put on rubber gloves, cleaned up the leak, and finished her shift. Several weeks later, another worker was exposed to liquid while reassembling the mixing equipment. It turned out to be potassium hydroxide, and the worker had to be hospitalized for a chemical burn.

Discuss the following questions as you design your reporting system.

- **What should be reported?** Your system should encourage reporting *all types* of safety and health concerns (injuries, illnesses, anticipated hazards from new processes or equipment, unsafe conditions or behaviors, close calls/near misses, hazards from non-routine tasks and potential emergencies, weaknesses of your safety and health program).
- **When should a hazard be reported?** Your system should empower workers to report hazards immediately. Workers should also know they can stop any operation they believe to be unsafe.
- **How should workers make reports?** Think of options for workers to report to management verbally and/or in writing. If possible, give workers a way to report anonymously.
- **How will management respond to reports?** Make sure your system directs management to *promptly* acknowledge reports and begin an investigation.
- **What should workers expect after making a report?** Your process should involve regular communication about actions taken to address reported hazards.
- **How will you make sure all workers understand the reporting process?** Consider barriers such as language, literacy, and internet access.
- **How will you make it clear no worker will face retaliation for reporting?** Make sure workers know you will only use reports to improve safety and health.
- **How might you recognize workers who identify and report hazards?** Consider a bonus, a gift certificate, or a public thank you.

**How will you involve workers in finding solutions to reported concerns?** Your system should encourage workers to suggest ways to eliminate or control the hazard. This could be at the time of the report, after the report, or both. This part of your system will be important when you begin work on hazard prevention and control.

### Follow Through!

Your reporting system will only be as good as the actions you take after a report. If management doesn't respond quickly, it seems like you don't care. If you don't communicate what you did to address a concern, workers will likely be discouraged from reporting in the future.

On the following page is an example of a form that one business created for reporting. Copies of the form were available for workers wishing to report something on a bulletin board and in the break room. After management completed the form, it was posted on the bulletin board. Workers were also welcome to make a hazard report verbally. In that case, the supervisor filled out the form and posted it. (You could also create a similar electronic form that could be filled out and submitted online.)

### Safety and Health Reporting Form

Please submit this form to a supervisor as soon as possible after you notice a safety or health issue.  
*Remember that you should stop any operation you feel is unsafe.*

Name (optional):

Date:

Location:

Facility, equipment, controls, work processes:

Description of the issue:

Suggested solution:

Signature (optional):

Supervisor's remarks:

Action taken:

Signature of supervisor:

Date: