

Create a Safety and Health Recognition Program for Your Workers

A GUIDE FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Introduction

Creating a safe and healthy workplace is not just about compliance; it's about protecting your most valuable asset, your people. A strong safety and health program can lead to fewer injuries and illnesses, reduced costs, increased productivity, and higher employee morale. A key component of a successful program is recognizing and rewarding the successes and contributions of your workers in achieving a safe and healthy work environment.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for small businesses. OSHA also has guides on this topic for large/medium size businesses, and [professional organizations](#) such as trade associations, business councils, and safety organizations, as they too can lead the adoption of workplace safety and health strategies.

You can show that you value worker engagement by leading safety initiatives, offering safety suggestions, and implementing a **safety and health recognition program** that recognizes workers who report hazards. Use this guide and the planning worksheet to develop a recognition program that focuses on easy and attainable activities.

Why Are Safety Recognition Programs Beneficial?

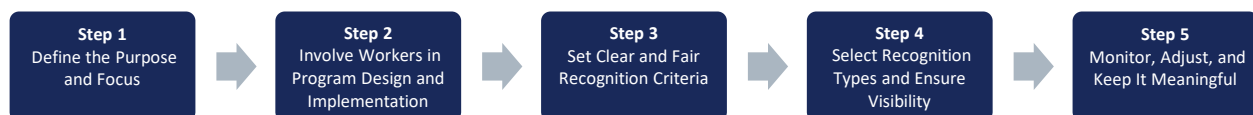
Workers are more likely to repeat positive safety actions if they know it is noticed and valued. Highlighting a safety accomplishment may inspire others to “step up” to find other opportunities to make their workplace safer and healthier. Your efforts can also show other businesses the importance of workplace safety.

OSHA's Recognition Programs

Consider joining one of OSHA's recognition programs as one way to demonstrate the value of your safety and health program.

- [Voluntary Protection Program \(VPP\)](#)
- [Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program \(SHARP\)](#)
- [Safety Champions](#)

5 Step Process for Building a Safety and Health Recognition Program



Step 1: Define the Purpose and Focus

Examine your organization's overall safety and health goals. Then, decide what types of actions, activities, or outcomes your recognition program will reward to support those goals. As you start planning, remember to:

Examine your approach to safety and health. Think about safety and health in your organization to identify untapped opportunities:

- Do you talk about safety and health regularly?
- Do workers speak up?
- How are close calls reported?
- Are there any trends in injuries or illnesses?
- Do you approach safety in a reactive or proactive manner?

Reflect on your answers to pinpoint what needs attention so that you can design your recognition program to address these areas. For example, if new hires struggle to follow safety protocols, reward workers who offer to be mentors or "safety buddies." If team safety meetings feel dull, reward workers who step forward to share innovative ideas for improvement.

Level up! Rotate Themes

Maintain the program's relevance and effectiveness by changing the safety themes each month. For example:

- **January:** Hazard Recognition
- **February:** Peer Support and Mentorship
- **March:** Speaking Up and Sharing Ideas

- **Promote desired actions—not just outcomes.** Refrain from structuring rewards around "no injuries" or "incident-free days." Instead, reward workers for actions like:
 - Proactively solving problems
 - Reporting unsafe conditions
 - Supporting a coworker's safety
 - Stopping work when there's a safety risk
 - Participating in safety improvement efforts

Step 2: Involve Workers in Program Design and Implementation

Ask for worker input when designing your recognition program, as an open dialogue can promote a culture for safety in the workplace. Ask questions like:

- What has a coworker done recently that made you feel safer at work?
- What types of actions would you like to see more of from each other? From your supervisor?
- What kind of recognition would make you feel appreciated or appeal to you the most?
- Do you prefer public or private recognition?

There are many ways to gather this information:

- Start a conversation during a safety huddle, toolbox talk, or informal check-in meeting
- Distribute a quick survey (ideally anonymous) to ask workers for input.
- Invite a small group of workers to form a “Recognition Crew” (perhaps one representative per work area) and have them:
 - Review recognition nominations
 - Select themes or honorees
 - Help spread the word about the recognition program

Level up! Peer to Peer Recognition

Allowing coworkers to nominate each other for recognition highlights positive contributions that leadership might not notice or be aware of, fosters a culture of teamwork, and prompts coworkers to actively look for the best in one another.

Step 3: Set Clear and Fair Recognition Criteria

Establishing clear, specific program criteria ensures that recognition is earned and aligned with safety and health goals. If the process for selecting recognition recipients is vague, inconsistent, or poorly defined, this can lead to confusion or make workers feel like the program is subject to favoritism. Think about the following:

Contribution Examples

- Proactive Hazard Reporting
- Participation in Safety Activities
- Safety Innovation and Leadership
- Exemplary Safe Work Practices
- Team Safety Milestones
- Safety and Health Improvements

See Appendix A for more details

- **Consider all workers.** Make sure your program covers workers from all shifts and job roles.
- **Use action-based criteria.** Focus on the specific actions that a person takes rather than focusing solely on outcomes. When assessing potential recipients, ask:
 - What actions did the person take that contributed to safety?
 - Were those actions proactive in nature?
 - Did their actions benefit others?
 - Can others learn from or replicate their actions in similar situations?

Step 4: Select Recognition Types and Ensure Visibility

There are many ways to recognize and reward workers for their commitment to safety and health. Determine which will resonate most within your workplace. The recognition does not need to be costly or complicated, but it should:

- **Be visible.** Publicly recognize safety achievements where everyone can see them (e.g., bulletin boards, digital message boards, email, group texts, company newsletter, shout outs in meetings).
- **Be timely.** Aim to recognize positive actions as soon as possible. It might seem like an afterthought or lose its relevancy if you wait too long.

⊘ Too generic	Certificate: Recognized for being a great team player.
☑ Good examples	Certificate: Recognized for stepping in to help a coworker safely guide a load after noticing a blind spot hazard. Companywide email: This month, Pat Jones received recognition for spotting and replacing a worn guard on the shear press, effectively preventing a potential hand injury. Thank you, Pat. We appreciate your proactive approach for keeping us safe.

- **Be specific.** Make sure people understand what action you are recognizing so that they feel accomplished, and others can learn from their good example.

Level up! Be Evolving

Set a rhythm (e.g., weekly shout-out, monthly award) but don't let it go stale. Consider refreshing your delivery approach every few months. For example:

- Rotate the messenger – have someone new announce an award or recognition.
- Highlight a different department or crew.
- Include team-based success stories every now and then rather than only focusing on individual accomplishments

Step 5: Monitor, Adjust, and Keep It Meaningful

Establishing a recognition program is just the beginning. The real challenge is maintaining its relevance and impact over time. Remember to:

- **Assess participation.** Make sure different people and departments are recognized.
- **Ask for and use feedback.** Have regular check-ins with workers, supervisors, and managers to confirm the recognition program is effective and meets its intended goals. Adjust the program as needed to incorporate helpful feedback.
- **Use milestones to reignite energy.** Find reasons to celebrate whenever your organization hits a major safety and health milestone. Don't let those opportunities slip away.

Use this worksheet to help develop your safety and health recognition program.

Prepared by:

Date:

1. What do you want your recognition program to accomplish? How will it support your workplace's overall safety and health program?
2. What types of activities or outcomes will you recognize? For example: Proactively identifying and solving safety problems, reporting unsafe conditions, supporting a coworker's safety, speaking up and stopping work when there's a safety risk, participating in safety improvement efforts.
3. Will you involve workers in designing and implementing your recognition program (Yes/No)? If yes, how will you do that?
4. How will you promote and advertise the recognition program?
5. How will you recognize workers' accomplishments? For example, will you issue verbal recognition (e.g., shout-outs at group meetings), written awards (e.g., certificates), tangible rewards (e.g., gift cards, trophies), or a combination of them?
6. Identify a schedule for issuing recognition (e.g., weekly, monthly, semi-annual).
7. Describe your nomination process. Who (e.g., supervisors, peers) can nominate a worker for recognition? How will nominations be submitted and to whom will they be submitted to?
8. What process will you use to evaluate and select recipients? Who will be involved in the decision-making?
9. What criteria will you use to evaluate and select recipients? Who will be involved in decision-making?
10. How will you announce, deliver, and publicize recognition?
11. How will you determine if your program is successful? How will you implement improvements if needed?

Recognition

Here are a few examples of types of recognition you could offer. Be creative! Think about what will resonate with your workforce and industry and reflects your organizational values.

- **Safety Milestones:** Awarded for achieving a long or short-term goal.
- **Innovation and Hazard Control:** Recognizes teams and individuals who have implemented creative solutions that reduce or eliminate workplace hazards.
- **Specific Practices:** Recognizes specific areas of safety, focusing on a particular area like process safety, safe driving, or emergency planning and response, etc.
- **Best of the Best:** Recognizes employees that have received recognition consistently over a period of time.
- **Most Improved:** Recognizes employees or teams who show improvements in safety and health.
- **Teams/Departments:** Recognizes teams achieving safety practices.
- **Individuals:** Awards for safety professionals, supervisors, ambassadors, mentors, and champions.

Appendix B: Strategies to Overcome Common Barriers

Small businesses often face hurdles with budget, time, and staffing. Here are strategies to launch and sustain your recognition program effectively.

Overcoming Budget Constraints

- **Focus on Recognition, Not Cash:** Sincere public or private praise from a manager can be more motivating than a small gift card. A handwritten note adds a powerful personal touch.
- **Leverage Low-Cost & No-Cost Privileges:** Offer rewards that are highly valued but cost little to nothing, such as a premium parking spot, an extra hour off, or a flexible schedule.
- **Use Team-Based Social Rewards:** Celebrate collective achievements with a team lunch or pizza party, which is cost-effective and builds camaraderie.
- **Empower Peer-to-Peer Recognition:** Formalize a free system where employees can give "shout-outs" to each other for safe actions, building a positive culture from the ground up.

Leveraging Available Resources

You don't have to build your program alone. Numerous free resources are available to help.

- **OSHA On-Site Consultation Program:** This free and confidential service is a cornerstone of assistance for small businesses. Consultants can help you identify hazards and establish or improve your safety and health program, which is the foundation for any recognition initiative. This service is separate from enforcement and does not result in penalties.
- **Federal and State Handbooks:** OSHA and NIOSH offer a "Small Business Safety and Health Handbook" with self-inspection checklists. Many state-plan states offer similar guides tailored to local industries.
- **Industry groups, trade and professional associations, business councils, unions.**

Overcoming Time and Staffing Constraints

- **Start Small and Simple:** You don't need a complex system from day one. Begin with one or two simple initiatives, like a "Safety Suggestion of the Month" or a "Good Catch" award.
- **Integrate, Don't Add:** Weave safety into existing routines. Dedicate the first five minutes of weekly team meetings to a "safety minute" to share a tip or recognize safe behavior.
- **Use Templates and Checklists:** Leverage ready-to-use resources like the plan in this toolkit to save time on document creation.

Designing Your Program: OSHA Guidance

It is critical to design your recognition program carefully. OSHA supports programs that encourage a culture for safety and recommends that they not discourage workers from reporting injuries, illnesses, or hazards.

- **Reward Proactive Behavior:** The most effective programs reward actions that prevent injuries, such as reporting near-misses, participating in training, or suggesting safety improvements.
- **Ensure a Strong Anti-Retaliation Policy:** Your program should be built on trust. The OSH Act prohibits retaliation against employees for exercising their safety rights.
- **Avoid Punishing Reporting:** A program that disqualifies an employee or team from a reward because of a reported injury creates a culture of underreporting.