

Reduce Workplace Risk With a Proactive Approach

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MOST FUEL DEALERS ARE FAMILIAR WITH RISK management on the financial side of the business, but what about managing risk in your company's day-to-day operations?

In short, when your company has a situation or condition that might impact your bottom line, that's a risk. The term Operational Risk Management (ORM) broadly defines a proactive process to assess, evaluate, and prioritize workplace risks and then implement changes to reduce or eliminate these risks.

ORM deals with both real and potential risks that could adversely affect your business. These risks could be caused by almost anything like inadequate training, flawed procedures, or external events like power outages, etc.

ORM BASICS

Although there are a few variations on risk management models, most businesses use a typical four-step model to evaluate their company's risk exposure. First, establish risk context (condition). Second, assess the risk (identify, analyze, and evaluate). Third, implement risk controls (acceptance, mitigation, or avoidance). Fourth, supervise (monitor, periodically review, and tweak).

You can find plenty of ORM reference material and worksheets on the web to help get you started. For further help, consider workplace risk consultants.

LESSONS LEARNED

Sharing a few examples here, you can see that getting a handle on workplace risk is largely finding and implementing common sense solutions.

For example, there's a great deal of value in simply documenting step-by-step procedures that staff can follow to perform their job correctly. Providing clear, understandable instructions for routine and non-routine

functions provide a reliable reference for newer and less-experienced staff. We try to document procedures for everything, from fill procedures and spill control measures, to security planning and training.

Don't just say it – display it. Signage works. A good example is a sign that we posted at our facility that explains off-loading procedures for receiving bulk product deliveries. The step-by-step procedures significantly reduced several risk factors, ensured that our staff was properly supervising the process, and it turned out to be a real time-saver too.

STAFFING RISK

Say that a few people in the office are out with the flu, and another will be out for a few weeks from a ski accident. With these folks out, how are key functions of your business getting done?

Cross training has become a key strategy in growing companies. Cross training an employee to do a different part of the company's work provides more flexibility in managing the workforce, and provides the employee with an opportunity to learn new skills. The ability to move staff around when folks are out sick or away on vacation significantly reduces these interruptions to the day-to-day operations.

Spending much of my time out of the office, I'm a big fan of the virtual office. The ability to have staff connect to our network from home or while traveling has proven invaluable. The sales folks have remote access to all of the information and documents they need without being tied to the office. Allowing employees to work from home also adds flexibility for employees to complete projects.

I can't say enough about the good things we see from our safety program. Our safety training and discussions result in fewer

incidents in the workplace, as well as on the road. That clearly impacts the bottom line.

The majority of our policies focus on potential risks. For example, many of our office staff are trained in CPR, First Aid, and how to use the office's automated external defibrillator (AED) in an emergency. Our company maintains an active drug and alcohol testing policy for all of our staff. We also established a strict "no cell phone use" policy while driving on company business.

EQUIPMENT CHANGES

We fit all our trucks with spill kits so drivers can handle small spills on their own. We also maintain a dedicated spill response truck that's fully stocked and ready to go.

Realizing the risk incurred during power outages, our facility has an emergency generator to keep the business operational. We also maintain portable generators for off-site use.

Now is a good time to review your company's network security, in light of recent cyber attacks on American businesses. Also, computer networks are constantly changing, so periodically review your back-up system to make sure there's no data slipping through the cracks. Consider using the "cloud" for off-site back-ups, which further reduces risk.

TEST YOUR PROCEDURES

Often overlooked, test your procedures periodically. Make sure the generator is working properly. If you have a disaster recovery plan in place, go through a dry run to be sure you know the procedures to access the back-up data, switch the phones over to another location, etc.

In the end, it's still about an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure. Companies need to be proactive as they look at workplace risks, and changes that help build business resilience. ☐