

350 Days Without A Recordable Injury

STOP™ training programs help reduce injuries and raise morale at disposable packaging manufacturing plant.



“STOP™ For Each Other helps highlight all the areas where we need improvement. We can take one unsafe observation and then drill down to find all the areas affected by it.”

**— Brian Rodriguez
Planning analyst
Huhtamaki, Los Angeles**

Huhtamaki produces disposable packaging manufactured from paper, plastic, films or molded fiber. It is a leading supplier worldwide of disposable plates, bowls, cups, napkins, containers and carriers. In the U.S. retail market, it is best known for its Chinet® premium brand of disposable tableware. Headquartered in Espoo, Finland, Huhtamaki operates facilities throughout Europe, the United States, and Australia.

Recently, the Huhtamaki manufacturing plant in Los Angeles celebrated 60 days without an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recordable injury. The milestone was marked with a plant-wide barbecue, but already Huhtamaki was looking ahead in hopes of surpassing its previous record—350 days without a recordable injury. That’s a far cry from 2004, when the company’s safety culture was in need of revitalization.

Situation

In 2004, the Huhtamaki manufacturing plant in Los Angeles faced a serious challenge: Its injury rate was high and morale was low. The company was committed to turning the situation around. However, after assessing the situation, senior management dismissed a top-down approach, in which management would dictate safety via policies and procedures. The company needed to actively involve employees at all levels to successfully change the safety culture at the plant. They decided to seek out a behavior-based system that would not only involve everyone at the plant, but would effectively help employees think pro-actively about safety in their work environment.

Solution

Because they wanted a frontline approach to safety, Huhtamaki chose DuPont’s STOP™ family of workplace safety-training tools to overhaul its safety performance. It began in 2004 with STOP™ For Supervision, a program that trains line management to take responsibility for controlling injuries and incidents through worker observations and discussions. Huhtamaki rolled out STOP™ For Supervision to 30 managers, supervisors and leads. The company was able to “test drive” the STOP™ tools with this small group, while ensuring crucial supervisory roles fully understood the program’s goals before introducing the program to the entire plant.

A year later, in 2005, Huhtamaki rolled out two additional STOP™ programs plant-wide: STOP™ For Each Other, a program designed to raise employee awareness of safety through a peer-to-peer approach, followed by STOP™ For Ergonomics, which trains employees to recognize ergonomic issues in the workplace. The STOP™ program became part of everyone’s performance objective.



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Challenges

Implementing and maintaining the program were not without obstacles. Scheduling the time required for all plant employees to attend training was a logistical challenge. But Huhtamaki realized that completing the training would benefit the company in the long run. They made a concerted effort to enable all employees to complete training with minimal disruption to the line.

Once the initial program rollout and fanfare died down, Huhtamaki turned its energy to maintaining employee focus and consistency. For example, hourly employees are required to conduct two safety checklists each month but, over time, employees became lax about the checklists, either failing to carry them out or failing to complete them. Huhtamaki addressed the issue by retraining all departments on the importance of safety and the need to allocate enough time each month to properly complete two checklists. "We let them know their comments mattered," said Brian Rodriguez, planning analyst for the Huhtamaki L.A. plant.

At the same time, Huhtamaki encountered glitches with safety observation follow-ups. While employees would document unsafe observations on their checklists, busy supervisors didn't always make time to follow-up with employees regarding their comments. Consequently, employees began to doubt if anyone was reading the STOP™ checklists or taking the program seriously. First, Huhtamaki reminded its supervisors how important follow-up was to the program's success. Then it began tracking all unsafe observations in a place accessible to all employees, along with the corrective actions taken. Publicly sharing this information reassured employees that management not only heard their safety concerns, but acted on them.

Early on, Huhtamaki also needed to allay employee apprehensions about discussing safety with one another. STOP™ For Each Other is a peer-to-peer training program, prompting employees to intervene when they observe an unsafe act. This can be intimidating. Approaching other people to talk about safety was a new concept for many employees. At the same time, employees weren't comfortable being approached and asked safety-related questions – some worried participating would lead to disciplinary action.

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To diminish such feelings, Huhtamaki used STOP™ training to explain to employees that the program was not a punitive one. Trainers reinforced the point that employees should not write specific employee names on observation checklists. Additionally, training stressed the proper way to approach safety discussions – giving a positive comment first, asking questions, etc. Trainers were careful to go over this approach thoroughly during training sessions.

Huhtamaki's biggest challenge came once the program was well under way. Tracking and organizing the volume of information collected in checklists each month was overwhelming. The company quickly solved this problem with STOP DataPro™.

"Everyone with access to STOP DataPro™ can enter data, so data reporting and collection is timelier and we are able to respond to trends quicker."

— Brian Rodriguez
Planning analyst
Huhtamaki, Los Angeles

The program allows the Huhtamaki plant to effectively track unsafe acts by department and by shift. It also allows management to export data to a spreadsheet to track comments and corrective actions. Huhtamaki uses the data to project trends and generate analysis of unsafe and safe acts that can be shared with all employees. This makes everyone in the plant aware of what issues the site needs to address.

Results

Since STOP™ was rolled out plant-wide in 2005, Huhtamaki has undergone a resounding transformation. All employees now perform safety observations (hourly employees conduct two per month and supervisors eight). Conducting these observations has raised the safety consciousness of all employees. As a result, Huhtamaki has experienced a 45 percent decrease in lost workdays—from 351 lost workdays in 2005 to 201 lost workdays in 2009. Overall, it has seen a 91 percent drop in injuries at the LA plant.

Huhtamaki also has seen a significant improvement in safe versus unsafe acts, and employees no longer hesitate to point out unsafe acts. "If the plant manager were to walk down to the floor without wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment, an hourly employee would have no problem stopping him and letting him know he was being unsafe," said Mr. Rodriguez.

Additionally, because all employees participate in STOP™ safety observations and are now in the habit of doing full observations with comments, Huhtamaki harvests a wealth of safety-related information. "We really look at comments here because they give us an idea what areas to work on," said Mr. Rodriguez.