

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

BEHAVIOUR BASED SAFETY PROGRAMS

Behaviour based safety programs assume that the vast majority of injuries and illnesses are a result of unsafe acts made by workers. These programs are not new. They became popular in the 1930's and 1940's and are one of the oldest, most seriously flawed and outdated approaches to health and safety. Behaviour based safety has its origin in the work from H.W. Heinrich. He was an Assistant Superintendent of the Engineering and Inspection Division of Travelers Insurance Company.

Heinrich obtained data about workplace injuries from investigated insurance claims as well as from poorly investigated workplace accident reports from supervisors. Heinrich proposed that 88% of workplace accidents were caused by unsafe acts (usually by the injured person). His findings are filled with undisguised racism, class bias and most definitely without merit.

Behaviour based safety programs appeal to many employers because they simplify health and safety and suggest that stopping unsafe behavior through discipline is easier than fixing the actual hazard.

Causes of Injuries & Illnesses

Every injury and illness is caused by an exposure to a hazard. Hazards include any aspect of technology or activity that produces risk. Hazards vary in the level of risk. The level of risk is determined by the severity and the probability of the occurrence.

Effective Health and Safety Programs

Effective health and safety programs use the information listed above for identifying, assessing and implementing recommendations for controls. Past experience and knowledge are embodied in standards and regulations. This method is not prejudiced by an assumption that the majority of injuries and illnesses are caused by unsafe acts. The hazards are prioritized based on the risk level according to the data identified by the work of the joint health and safety committee.

Effective Controls

The best method of selecting controls to minimize risk associated with any hazard is known as the "Hierarchy of Controls". It recognizes the most effective way in preventing or reducing exposures. Behaviour based approaches turn the hierarchy of controls upside down.

MOST
EFFECTIVE



LEAST
EFFECTIVE

Hierarchy of Controls

1. Elimination or Substitution
2. Engineering
3. Warnings
4. Training and Procedures
5. Personal Protective Equipment

Behaviour Based Approach

1. Identify Critical Worker Behaviour
2. Inspect, Observe Compliance with Critical Behaviour Inventory
3. Warn, Coach, Reward, Punish

Unions Goal

Establishing effective health and safety programs that do not undermine the health and safety of our membership is the most effective approach. Our programs must enlist participation from workers, first to address hazards and conditions and then to get the issues fixed.

Union Approach

1. Identify hazards
2. Assess level of risk
3. Controls according to hierarchy

Behaviour based programs are not an effective approach to accident/incident prevention.

Our union and the membership take accident investigation very seriously. When we investigate accidents, we search for root causes and implement controls using the hierarchy of controls. What we find is very different from the unsafe acts that BBS proponents say cause accidents. We identify that there are multiple causes related to hazards and unsafe conditions, not multiple unsafe behaviours.

Behaviour based safety is meant to change worker behaviour. These programs are not likely to address the actual hazards. When hazards do not get addressed properly, they do not get fixed.

Our union does not support participation in behaviour based safety programs such as “Dupont Safety Stop” or “Safety Start”. These programs are designed to blame workers and shift responsibility away from management and the employer, despite the legal responsibility under law that states the employer must do their due diligence and take every precaution to protect the health and safety of workers.