

Apex Engineering International, L.L.C.: Not a Single Work Day Lost in 4 Years

Apex Engineering International, L.L.C. (AEI) of Wichita, Kansas has manufactured aircraft components for commercial, regional and military markets of the aerospace industry for more than 50 years. Plant I produces detail aviation parts, while the assembly is accomplished at Plant II.

Several years ago, AEI acquired the assets of a failing company leading to many significant changes. It was learned that there had been three major accidents over the past three years that resulted in the loss of fingers and hands with the use of the newly acquired machinery. In the words of new President and Chief Executive Officer Jeff Landreth, "Something was very wrong and had to change immediately." He also said, "I believed a world class company should care as much about its employees as it does about its profits."

Events soon began that would lead to a cultural transformation for AEI. A Director of Safety was hired. A Safety Board was formed with representatives from every employee group of the company and given the task of establishing safety policy. And then, AEI began to take a hard look at their safety record.

Many interesting and revealing facts and trends were discovered during the safety evaluation that proved to be extremely beneficial for AEI. It was learned that 42 percent of all accidents involved new employees within their first year of employment. Wednesdays were the worst day of the week for injuries. The worst month of the year for injuries was July. A major injury such as the loss of an eye, hand or finger was occurring every 18 months. Most injuries involved material handling. Workers compensation costs were soaring. It was also revealed that the company lacked both a training plan and a daily equipment safety check list/procedure. This detailed review provided AEI with information they used to identify and focus on safety problem areas.

With the help of the free, confidential Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) on-site consultation services provided by the Kansas Department of Labor, AEI began to tackle their safety problems. Larry Landreth, Director of Safety, wrote "Under the leadership of the OSHA consultation program, we began to see immediate results and a new perception was established for our company."

Many changes were instituted. A safety orientation program was developed and a safety handbook was created. A buddy program was implemented to pair every new employee with a seasoned employee for 20 days; the seasoned employee ensures the new employee learns and performs all job tasks safely.

After making many safety improvements, the Safety Board voted to compete for the Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP) Award. In February 2008, AEI received the highest safety designation bestowed on small businesses by OSHA for exceptional commitment and dedication to effective safety and occupational health management systems. During the SHARP Award presentation, Judy Freeman, Area Director, OSHA-Wichita Area Office said, "Getting to be a SHARP site is no small undertaking. SHARP criteria are stringent. Apex Engineering International, L.L.C. has undergone a rigorous review process by the State of Kansas consultants."

There have been many other rewards for AEI. In 2006, when the Total Recordable Case (TRC) industry average rate was 6.3, AEI's rate was 4.7. As of January 2009, there has not been a single work day lost during the past 4 years despite a significant increase in the number of employees. Jeff Landreth reported, "Our workman's compensation insurance rates have dropped dramatically saving the company money, the employees can come to work in the morning knowing that they will make it home to their families at night without getting hurt. Productivity is higher because we have no lost work days due to injuries. Most of all though, I sleep better at night knowing that I didn't contribute to the injury of one of our most valuable assets—our employees."

In any manufacturing business, there are many dangerous machines and a lot of opportunities for injuries. The employees of AEI have noticed the difference the commitment to safety has made for their company. One employee referred to the safe working environment at AEI as "the backbone of success." Another said, "It is nice to go to work at a place that has my best interest at heart." A third employee said, "I find myself teaching my family safety practices that I have learned at work."



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