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## Safety Plans

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### Introduction

Developing a successful safety program should start with a communication tool that can describe workplace hazards, policies and procedures for accident prevention, and effective measures should an accident occur. A written safety plan is a strategic way to provide that communication and express formal expectations for safety and health. In order to be successful, the elements in the safety plan should be practiced in every aspect of the workday. Building a culture of safety will bring workers and employers an immense bounty of benefits.

Of course the obvious benefits are reduced employee illness and injuries and therefore increased productivity, but look deeper. Workers compensation claims will be reduced, family stress due to injury and/or reduced income will be minimized, the community perception of the company will be favorable, employees will feel valued and worker retention will increase. The National Safety Council reported that a worker is injured on the job every seven seconds (National Safety Council, InjuryFacts.nsc.org, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Many of these injuries are preventable and a robust safety plan coupled with a workplace culture of safety can reduce incidents.

### What Makes a Good Safety Plan?

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) mandates written safety plans for several chemicals and workplace processes (OSHA 29 CFR 1910 for general

industry). OSHA recommends voluntary safety plans for all facilities and organizations to be proactive and focused on workplace safety and security. OSHA has established guidelines to create a well-developed safety plan (OSHA 29 CFR 1926). Elements of a successful safety plan include commitment, accountability, involvement, education and training, assessment and analysis, evaluation and improvement. By gathering information related to current practices and evaluating existing policies and process safety measures, a complete safety plan can be created.

**Commitment:** Upper management can show its commitment to employees by creating an obtainable mission statement and developing goals and objectives to help achieve the vision. Safety strategies are then developed to provide a way to understand how the goals will be achieved.

**Accountability:** This ensures that the responsible and accountable persons are listed as points of contact. Formal standards of behavior and performance are developed as policies, plans and/or procedures. Resources are provided to meet the formal standards. These resources can be tools, equipment, materials, recognition/awards, training, and culture. An effective system of measurement in the form of performance reviews and feedback is coupled with appropriate and effective consequences. The system of accountability should be evaluated continuously.

**Involvement:** This element ensures that employees are involved and have ownership over the safety culture. Employees suggest safety team or committee membership, performing inspections, employee engagement and defining how the written

safety plan will be communicated to the entire organization. Some examples are training courses, excellence in compliance with safety rules, meetings and safety talks.

**Education and training:** In order to ensure and improve the skills, knowledge and attitudes of the entire workforce, training policies should be established. These policies should include both the purpose of safety education and training, and the accountable and responsible persons for conducting and managing training. A robust education program should include specific education that will be required of employees and when the training should be implemented. This can include on-board and initial training, refresher training, certification and renewal, on-the-job training, and training when new personal protection equipment and/or hazards are introduced to the workplace.

**Assessment and Analysis:** Conducting a Risk Assessment is done to assess and analyze safety hazards and unsafe work practices. A risk assessment will evaluate the workplace to identify those items, situations and/or processes that may cause harm. This is done through observations, incident/accident investigations, inspections, employee input and interviews. This can be the responsibility of managers and supervisors directly in contact with each system, the safety committee and/or safety coordinator.

**Evaluation:** The evaluation of a safety program will ensure that the program continues to be effective and can determine any potential weaknesses. Evaluating the programs strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for and threats to improvement is essential in improving the program. In many cases, a gap analysis can be executed to determine if there are any “holes” in the program that need to be addressed. A good safety program must be evaluated consistently to retain its intended result.

**Improvement:** In conjunction with evaluation, a method of continuous improvement is needed. One method is the Deming Improvement Cycle

which consists of four key stages: plan, do, study and act. The first stage within the Deming cycle is to “Plan” ahead to understand what the organization wants to achieve. This is both a practical and theoretical step. The planning stage is both an attempt to improve the outcomes and a scientific investigation of the safety plan and its proposed changes. The second stage “Do” looks at implementing a change on a small scale. Instead of overhauling the entire system or operation, initiating a smaller change, while testing the hypothesis is more effective. “Study” is the third stage and allows the team to draw conclusions of why it worked and what went right or wrong. The “Act” stage is both the final stage of the process and the first stage of the next cycle. The ultimate purpose is to implement the improvements that were successful and incorporate new results and knowledge to restart the cycle.

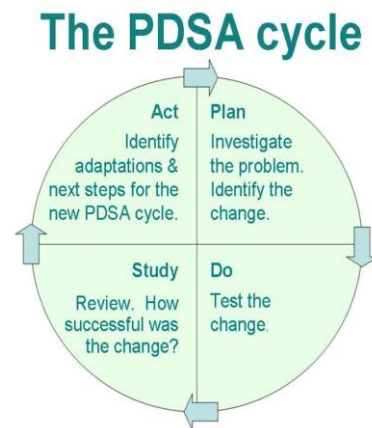


Figure 1. The PDSA Cycle, The W. Edwards Deming Institute

## Conclusion

Developing a written safety plan can be a daunting task for any employer. It's important to have a viable and well-written plan to include OSHA's requirements and recommendations. Organizations that identify workplace hazards and prioritize safety strategies will reduce injuries, fatalities and increase worker retention and productivity. The team at Gossman Consulting, Inc. offers the expertise to design a successful safety plan, implement and improve safe practices, and provide training.

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