

# Occupational Hazards

THE MAGAZINE OF SAFETY, HEALTH AND LOSS PREVENTION

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# Building Safety Board by Board at Koppers

At this producer of carbon compounds and treated wood products, safety and environmental values are the foundation on which the company is built.

In 2002, 12 Koppers facilities qualified for the National Safety Council's Excellence Achievement Award. Koppers, which produces carbon compounds and treated wood products for use by the utility, construction, railroad, aluminum, chemical and steel industries, operates 39 facilities in the United States, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and South Africa.

Those facilities represent more than half the facilities the company operates in the United States. The NSC Excellence Achievement Award program recognizes companies that implement safety processes or systems, and honors efforts to build a workplace culture and environment that focuses on safety.

"We commend our employees for focusing their attention on safe work practices," said Randall D. Collins, vice president, Safety, Health & Environmental Affairs for Koppers, headquartered in Pittsburgh. "These plants have created a safety climate where workers care about each other's well being, and these awards are a reflection of our company's



**Randall D. Collins**

commitment to continuous safety improvement."

"At Koppers, safety, health and environmental (SH&E) values and principles are paramount, according to Walter W. Turner, CEO and president. "They ensure the well-being of Koppers employees and that of the communities in which Koppers operates. At Koppers,

these are words that we live by, every day," he says.

## SH&E Policy

According to Turner, the company's SH&E policy affirms its commitment to designing, implementing and managing workplace and product safety processes that protect the environment, customers, employees and neighbors. "Our business decisions are guided by this policy," says Turner, "because we know that SH&E performance must lead profitability."

The policy includes the following elements:

- Compliance with all applicable federal, state and local SH&E laws, regulations and with other requirements to which Koppers subscribes;
- Pollution prevention in order to preserve the environment for the health, productivity and enjoyment of future generations;
- Continuous improvement of safety, health and environmental systems and performance;
- Communication regarding business operations and potential risks, both internally and externally.

# The Power of Positive Safety

**A**s director of risk management services for R&R Insurance, an insurance agency based in Waukesha, Wis., Frank Wegner visits a lot of workplaces and he has become adept at sizing up a company's culture. At a company like client E.R. Wagner, he said, creating a positive safety environment almost seems easy. Yet, he observed, "You try to take people in a totally negative culture and have them look at that company, and they will say, 'We can never do that.'"

But according to the safety officials we contacted at four award-winning companies – Air Systems Components, BASF, Koppers and E.R. Wagner Casters & Wheels – creating a positive safety culture is possible for any company. It takes work and continuing dedication, but it can be accomplished and the benefits result in fewer injuries, lower workers' compensation costs and a work force that is happier and more productive. Here is their advice on the key elements to have in place.

## Culture and Leadership

It is fashionable for companies to identify their employees as their most important assets, but safety success is built on managers believing that and acting accordingly.

Randy Collins, vice president, safety, health and environmental affairs for Koppers, noted that his Pittsburgh-based company operates a multitude of locations in the United States and abroad that are relatively small. Traditionally, this has been reflected, he said, in a caring work force and family culture where "we know our workmates and their families." He said the company wants to maintain those good qualities even as it moves to incorporate increasingly sophisticated management systems. Recently, Koppers won the National Safety Council's Green Cross Safety Excellence Achievement Award, honoring its efforts to build a workplace culture and environment that focuses on safety.

To make safety a continuing success, you have to "recognize it, compliment it, nurture it, encourage it."

*by Stephen G. Minter*

Anita Orozco, who manages human resources and safety for Air Systems Components in Tucson, recalled that it was only a few years ago when "OSHA was pretty much at our door every single day." Changing the culture at the facility, which manufactures grills and registers for HVAC units, required "a lot of discipline" initially, she said, as company managers struggled to convince employees that they were serious about the new emphasis on safety. But now, she observed, "It's nice because we have employees who know that our top priority is not production or anything other than safety."

Making safety a value in the company requires more than simply good will. Top management needs to clearly communicate the importance of safety and hold managers and employees accountable for safety performance. At Koppers, for example, an executive-level council chaired by the CEO meets monthly to review injury statistics, accident reports and the steps taken to prevent or minimize the likelihood of recurrence. New policies and action steps are developed. Communications from the council, Collins noted, go out as a single voice from the chief executive. "There is real power to that," he noted. "It has been an important element of our improvement."

Koppers' Collins also emphasized the importance of accountability. "We expect the plant manager to be the most outspoken person about the interest the company has in ensuring that employees get to go home as healthy and safe as when they showed up at work. We won't excuse the plant manager from that role, no matter whom she or he may have

dedicated to that discipline." Safety is a component of managers' goals and performance evaluations, two tools that directly affect their base pay and incentive compensation.

Collins said employees need to know that line management is committed to safety. "The plant manager doesn't do an accident investigation because there is a form to be filled out. He doesn't hold a safety meeting because there is one that is required at this moment in time," he said. "If he is doing that, he is never going to motivate employees because our employees are smart enough to smell that out."

Last year, Koppers, a producer of carbon compounds and treated wood products, developed a safety awareness training program that was presented to every U.S. employee. This year, Koppers is targeting supervisory safety skills first and then offering leadership safety training for company executives. Koppers also is requiring all locations to initiate behavioral safety programs. "We want to know that people are uniformly well-informed about company policy, that they follow it and that they are willing to stick their neck out and take responsibility for observing and, if necessary, correcting the acts and conduct of others," said Collins.

Koppers holds an annual meeting for every plant manager and dedicated safety and environmental manager. "We pull those personnel into Pittsburgh and spend three days training, communicating, discussing policy and going through some work situational analysis, all for the sake of trying to strengthen our knowledge systemwide," said Collins.



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Koppers makes products that support these vital industries – high-quality products that are backed by our global commitment to customers, employees, safety, health and the environment.

Our logo symbolizes the Koppers commitment to protect the environment, to operate safely, to be good neighbors in our communities and to be an outstanding supplier for our customers. The colors of blue and green signify that we are environmentally conscious. The globe symbolizes our international scope, because the name Koppers is a brand known around the world.

Koppers, with corporate headquarters and a research center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is a global integrated producer of carbon compounds and treated wood products. Including its joint ventures, Koppers operates 39 facilities in the United States, United Kingdom, Denmark, Australia, the Pacific Rim and South Africa.

Learn more about our products and services at [www.koppers.com](http://www.koppers.com).



At Koppers, we are working to make today and tomorrow safer for our employees, communities, customers and the environment.