New Employee Orientation

Think about your first day on the job. Do you remember the anticipation of starting with a new employer? How about all of the new sights and sounds of your new place of work, or how about all of the forms that you had to complete? And then, you had your safety orientation. How much of the training did you really retain by the end of the day?

A new employee safety orientation should be more than a first day program. A workplace can be hazardous and a few videos, rules and warnings may not be enough to protect your employees. By using a graduated orientation program, you can build your employees’ knowledge base and allow them to operate safely on the job.

The First Day
The first day program should be the point where you begin instilling the safety culture of your organization. It is important to cover the variety of OSHA-required topics and other safety information, although it is also important not to overwhelm the employees before they understand how this information applies to their job. Keep in mind that under the stress of a new job, most employees will retain very little from their first day of training. That is why the new employee orientation only begins on the first day.

A trusted and knowledgeable supervisor or employee should be assigned as a mentor to the new employee. This should be someone who helps translate the general safety information into on-the-job safety practices. This person can help point the new employee in the right direction and keep them from making a dangerous error.

Thirty-Day Follow Up
At thirty days, most employees have established a basic comfort level with their new job and the people around them. Now is the time to follow up on some of that first-day training that may not have been absorbed. As you discuss your safety program and key elements of your organization’s safety rules and practices, the employee is now better able to understand the relevance of this information. The discussion of your animal restraint practices makes a lot more sense now that the employee has actually worked with clients and their pets. This is also the time to discuss these issues in more depth, if necessary.

Various regulatory agencies require that employees be given a set of pamphlets at the time of hire. Each employee in a California business must be given five pamphlets upon starting employment. The pamphlets are: Disability Insurance, For Your Benefit, Paid Family Leave, Sexual Harassment Employee Brochure, and Workers Compensation Time of Hire. The CVMA offers these pamphlets in five-employee and 10-employee sets. As an added benefit to CVMA members, sets are offered at a discounted rate. For employers who have not provided these pamphlets to employees at their time of hire, it is recommended that they be purchased now and distributed to all employees. Call the CVMA at 1-800-655-2862 or go to www.CVMA.net to order them today.

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Ninety-Day Follow Up
By now, the employee has settled into a routine and he or she is comfortable with their job. This is the best time to review the materials presented in the first-day and thirty-day training and reinforce your organization’s safety culture. Chances are
that the employee will be much more willing to ask questions and provide feedback on what they have learned. You don’t need to cover all of the training from the earlier sessions, although this is a good time to question the employee to see how much they understand.

**Skill Level Training**

Skill level training should be required before an employee is allowed to complete more hazardous tasks or operate certain equipment. If you review your employee’s tasks, you will probably find many that require specific skills. In much the same way you would provide your employee with a road test before turning over the hospital’s truck to the employee, you should identify other tasks or equipment that require more extensive on-the-job training. This is not to say that these skills cannot be learned on the job, but that the person providing the training should also review safety procedures along with operation procedures. A simple evaluation can confirm that the employee has attained the necessary skill level. Many employees conducting tasks beyond their skill level have been seriously injured. By formalizing this process, you can be assured that the new employee has the knowledge and skill to complete the task safely.

**Training Resources**

For many tasks, a general safety video and some discussion may be adequate. Other tasks may be too specific to rely on general information. A Job Safety Analysis (JSA) program is an excellent training resource for these more complicated situations. In addition to providing procedures for a given task, a good JSA program will outline the specific hazards of a task and what precautions are necessary to complete it safely.

Your own accident history is another excellent resource. You are not permitted to provide names of injured employees to discuss what happened, how it happened and how to prevent the accident from occurring in the future. Chances are that if one employee made an error that resulted in an injury, the potential still exists for it to occur again. Providing real-life examples of accidents and understanding their cause can allow the new employee to learn from others’ hard-learned lessons.

Don’t forget outside resources. Your local fire department may be able to provide your employees with fire extinguisher training or assist with an evacuation drill. You may have a local resource who can discuss workplace violence prevention. Outside resources can sometimes breathe new life into a training program. You will also find a wide variety of materials on the Fireman’s Fund RiskAdvisor® website or those of other insurance carriers. For example, a Lessons Learned-type article can be a powerful tool to bring an important topic to life. You can tell an employee how dangerous improper operation of a kennel heater can be, but discussing an actual incident with consequences and a lesson to be learned can be more valuable.

**Conclusion**

New employee orientation is critical to an organization’s safety culture. Statistics show that an employee is much more prone to injury during the first year on the job and turnover rates within the veterinary industry are higher than those of many other industries. The greater injury potential may be due in part to an employee’s lack of knowledge. By reinforcing your safety rules, policies and procedures, you can impact not only your new employee’s safety practices, but other employees’ safety practices as well.

This bulletin provides general information that may apply to many business operations; therefore, it is not a comprehensive treatise on the subject, or a turnkey plan to be implemented. Consult with your staff and/or specialists to determine how best this information may guide you to specific plans for your operations. Additionally, this bulletin does not substitute for legal advice, which should come from your own counsel. All recommendations described in this bulletin are generic and not specific to your unique business operation.

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