

WHAT'S INSIDE

- 2 Sharpen Your Judgment**
Company knew worker would be in danger?
- 3 What's Coming**
Report: Silica enforcement falling short
- 4 Who Got Fined – And Why**
Double fatal fire results in almost \$118K in fines
- 5 What's Worked for Other Companies**
When Notice of Violations isn't received
- 6 Safety Regs Update**
Cal/OSHA introduces two new violation categories
- 8 What Would You Do?**
Behind on big order: Is OT the answer or a safety nightmare?

SAFETY NEWS ALERT

Safety News Alert, part of the Catalyst Media Network, keeps safety pros up to date on the latest OSHA news, safety training ideas, workers' comp cases and injury cases from other companies. Read what more than 334,000 safety pros turn to regularly for occupational safety information. Safety News Alert's editorial staff is led by veteran Editor-in-Chief Fred Hosier.

Massive, fatal explosion caused by policy/practice deficiencies

■ Report points to operational issues as root cause

While mixing chemicals led to an explosion that killed four workers, a federal investigation says deeper operational problems were the real cause.

Recommendations in the report amount to more than just figuring out how not to mix the wrong chemicals again.

A U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) final report says the cause of the massive explosion and fire at the AB Specialty Silicones LLC manufacturing facility in Waukegan, IL, on May 2, 2019, was “deficiencies in ... operations,

policies, and practices ... and the lack of a safety management system addressing process safety.”

Same drum, different chemical

Here are the specifics of what happened on the day of the explosion, according to the CSB:

- Employees were performing a batch operation that involved manually mixing chemicals in a tank
- An employee pumped an incorrect chemical into the tank
- The incorrect, incompatible chemical was stored in a drum almost identical to one with

(Please see Policy deficiencies ... on Page 2)

PPE

Half of exposed workers don't use hearing protection

A new NIOSH study says many workers still don't use hearing protection devices (HPD) when exposed to noise on the job, including in some unexpected industries.

Among all noise-exposed workers, 53% said they didn't use HPD “always” or “usually.”

NIOSH researchers found some of the highest rates of HPD non-use among exposed workers were in industries where fewer workers overall are exposed to loud noise, such as finance and insurance.

The study recommends:

- targeted attention to workers exposed to loud noise in these industries, and
- employers provide an assortment of HPDs tailored to noise level and type, workplace environment, communication and audibility

needs, and individual comfort and convenience.

Gender and age are factors

Researchers also found women, workers ages 18-25 and current smokers had a significantly higher rate of HPD non-use. These results are consistent with results in previous studies.

Dr. Elizabeth Masterson, research epidemiologist and study co-author, recommends:

- increasing worker awareness about proper, consistent HPD use
- increasing worker training about HPD use, and
- removing barriers to HPD use by ensuring workers have HPD that's comfortable and doesn't overprotect from noise so they can hear speech and other important workplace signals.

Policy deficiencies ...

(continued from Page 1)

- the correct chemicals – the only difference between the two drums were small labels that listed their contents
- A chemical reaction occurred inside the tank, causing the contents to foam and overflow
 - Hydrogen gas was produced, which released inside the facility's production building
 - Soon after the hydrogen gas release, it ignited, causing a massive explosion and fire, and
 - The explosion fatally injured four employees, destroyed the production building, and forced the company to cease some operations and relocate others until rebuilding occurred.

More than a mix-up

But the CSB says there was more to what led to the explosion than just a mix-up in chemicals.

Beyond mixing incompatible materials, the CSB investigation noted problems in these safety areas:

- **Hazard analysis:** AB Specialty's "technical service request" process didn't assess the hazards of performing a process operation or establish safeguards to reduce risk. On top of that, the CSB found the company didn't take sufficient action to improve its hazard analysis program after a drum explosion in 2014.
- **Emergency preparedness:** Workers didn't recognize the immediate hydrogen hazard created by the chemical mix-up. Without gas detectors and alarms, or effective training, the workers didn't realize they needed to evacuate.

More than just a mix-up in chemicals

- **Process safety culture:** "In the years leading up to the incident, AB Specialty exhibited characteristics of a weak process safety culture," according to the CSB. This included lack of engineering controls, heavy reliance on procedural controls as primary safeguards, allowing incompatible chemicals to be visibly undifferentiated and not performing a thorough hazard analysis. The lack of hazard analysis also led to storing reactive chemicals in similar containers.
- **Safety management system:** AB Specialty didn't have a safety management system that addressed process safety at the time of the incident.
Key: Correcting just the chemical mix-up could leave the company open to other process safety mistakes down the road.
More comprehensive corrections, including establishment of a safety management system that addresses process safety at the facility, will have a much broader positive effect on safety.

Info: [csb.gov/ab-specialty-silicones-llc/](https://www.csb.gov/ab-specialty-silicones-llc/)

SHARPEN YOUR JUDGMENT

This feature provides a framework for decision making that helps keep you and your company out of trouble. It describes a recent legal conflict and lets you judge the outcome.

■ COMPANY KNEW WORKER WOULD BE IN DANGER?

"Let's take it from the top again, OK?" company attorney John Jenkins said. "OSHA's citing us."

"I'm sorry," Safety Manager Pete Travers said. "I just can't believe an experienced, safety-conscious lineman like Eddie got hurt."

"Don't you always say, 'Even experienced workers can have lapses in judgment?'" John asked.

"Yes, but Eddie is the last person I'd expect to get hurt," Pete said.

Good crew, analysis, reminders

"Tell me what happened again," John said.

"We had a crew installing fiber-optic cable on utility poles that were already being used for power lines," Pete said.

"This was in an area of really rough terrain, with lots of brush and tree cover, so it wasn't easy to see what you were doing," Pete explained.

"With that in mind, the supervisor gave multiple reminders to be extra careful on top of having a toolbox talk and doing a hazard analysis before work began," Pete added.

"Between how experienced the crew was, the reminders and the analysis, the crew was well aware how far away they needed to be from the power lines," Pete said. "Somehow, Eddie still managed to contact a power line and get shocked."

"We can fight this," John said. "The company had no knowledge Eddie would ignore all of that."

Pete's company fought the citation. Did it win?

■ *Make your decision, then please turn to Page 6 for the ruling.*

SAFETY COMPLIANCE *Alert*

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INSPECTOR GENERAL

Report: Silica enforcement falling short

■ OSHA FAILING MILLIONS OF WORKERS DUE TO LAPSE IN PROGRAMS

A recent investigation by the Department of Labor's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) into OSHA's respirable silica rule enforcement reveals the agency needs to do more, as its recent efforts are falling short, due in part to a lapse in silica national emphasis programs.

OIG's audit was conducted to see to what extent OSHA has gone to protect workers from exposure to respirable crystalline silica, which involved review of inspection and violation data, interviews with OSHA staff, and review of outreach and guidance efforts.

The findings

Inspection data for the two fiscal years after the silica rule became enforceable on March 25, 2016, shows OSHA performed an average of 440 inspections per year.

In the two years before the rule became enforceable, the agency performed an average of 1,054 silica inspections per year.

So after the final rule became enforceable, OSHA actually performed 600 fewer silica inspections on average, a decrease of more than 50%.

Further, the audit revealed that OSHA failed to set clear processes for evaluating the effectiveness of its outreach efforts for the 2.3 million workers at risk for silica exposure.

The OIG report primarily attributes this decline in inspections to a more than two-year lapse between silica national emphasis programs.

Recommendations

- The report recommends OSHA:
- implement a policy for future emphasis programs that would minimize the lapse in enforcement between canceled, revised or new programs, and
 - establish meaningful goals and processes to assess whether outreach events are achieving the desired results.
- OSHA generally agreed with these findings, but said it felt it was appropriate to give employers time to adjust to new mandates, which can lead to a gap between enforcement efforts.

PANDEMIC

NSC: Employer requirements increase vaccination rates

When employers require employees to get COVID-19 vaccinations, what happens? A new National Safety Council (NSC) study has the answer, plus more information on the world of safety during the pandemic.

Employer vaccine requirements increased worker vaccination rates by 35%, according to the NSC's report, A Year in Review, and What's Next: COVID-19 Employer Approaches and Worker Experiences.

The NSC's statistic mirrors reports from employers that have initiated vaccination mandates. For example, United Airlines required all of its employees to be vaccinated. Only 593 employees out of 67,000 didn't

comply, which is less than 1%. (Less than 3% applied for exemptions.)

Only 4% of unvaccinated workers have an employer vaccination requirement, compared to 22% of vaccinated workers, the NSC says.

How are employers doing?

About two-thirds of workers were either extremely or somewhat satisfied with their employer's pandemic response and felt it adequately protected them and their co-workers.

However, employers are more confident about their control measures than employees are, with masks and distancing being rated by workers as more effective than ventilation changes and increasing time between shifts.

TRENDS TO WATCH

Watch what's happening in various states. Some actions indicate trends.

■ OWNERS CHARGED IN \$3.6M COMP FRAUD SCHEME

The owners of a California car wash were charged Sept. 29 in a \$3.6 million workers' compensation fraud scheme.

Behzad Bandari and Sam Siam, the owners of Waterdrops Express Car Wash, allegedly underreported more than \$3.6 million in employee payroll to fraudulently reduce their workers' compensation insurance premium by \$369,210.

Both men are scheduled to appear in court on Dec. 12, 2021, according to a California Department of Insurance news release.

Bandari was the chief financial officer of the business, and Siam was the company's chief executive officer.

They were identified as shareholders and managing partners in a chain of car wash locations that spanned across three counties and were organized under multiple corporate entities.

On March 25, 2020, the California Department of Insurance began an investigation into the car wash business after receiving a tip from an insurance company.

■ LAW PROVIDES PREFERENCE TO INJURED WORKERS

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy signed a law Sept. 24 requiring employers to provide a hiring preference to employees who reached maximum medical improvement following a work-related injury.

This applies to employers with at least 50 employees and protects only employees who are injured at work, have reached maximum medical improvement and are unable to return to their previous position, but aren't completely unable to work due to their disability, according to law firm Morgan, Lewis & Bockius.

Roundup of most recent OSHA citations

Go to www.SafetyComplianceAlert.com/fines for more OSHA fines and injury settlements.

Double fatal fire results in almost \$118K in fines

Two companies were cited for safety violations following a fire at a packaging plant that killed two workers.

An investigation found the incident occurred when a heat gun fell into a bucket of resin at the Evergreen Packaging Plant, resulting in a fire that killed two contractor employees.

Evergreen wasn't cited.

Fines: \$117,775 (Industrial Services Group \$112,000; Rimcor \$5,775)

Companies: Industrial Services Group and Rimcor Inc., both of Canton, NC

Businesses: Industrial coatings and linings (Industrial Services Group); general contractor (Rimcor)

Reasons for fines:

Industrial Services Group

One willful serious violation:

- flammable liquids with a flashpoint below 100 degrees-F were used where there were open flames

One serious violation:

- flammable liquids with a flashpoint below 100 degrees-F were dispensed into containers in which the nozzle and container weren't electrically interconnected

One non-serious violation:

- confined space entry protocol violations

Rimcor

One serious violation:

- failure to develop and implement procedures to coordinate entry operations when employees of more than one employer were working simultaneously as authorized space entrants in a confined space

One non-serious violation

- other violations of the confined space program requirements

Workers exposed to confined space hazards

An Ohio lighting fixture manufacturer was cited after inspectors found employees were

routinely entering powder-coating ovens without testing atmospheric conditions or locking out natural gas lines.

The company exposed workers to asphyxiation and energy hazards by failing to designate the ovens as permit-required confined spaces and by failing to use lockout/tagout procedures.

Fine: \$119,757

Company: Schneider Electric, Oxford, OH

Business: Lighting fixture manufacturing

Reasons for fine:

17 serious violations, including failure to:

- ensure reclassified confined space posed no actual or potential atmospheric hazards
- develop and implement means, procedures and practices for safe permit space entry operations
- test conditions in permit space to determine if acceptable entry conditions exist before entry
- ensure each entry supervisor knew hazards of permit required confined spaces

Contractors fined after gate crushes, kills worker

OSHA cited three contractors after a 3,000-pound metal gate fell on a construction worker, killing him.

An investigation found all three failed to conduct proper inspections, train employees to identify hazards and install signs warning workers about hazards.

Note: OSHA did not provide information on the breakdown of the fines or the severity of the violations.

Fine: a total of \$64,169

Companies: Penta Building Group, Las Vegas; No Limit Steel, Los Angeles; and The Raymond Group, Orange, CA

Businesses: Construction contractors

Reasons for fine:

Three violations for failure to:

- conduct hazard inspections
- instruct employees on how to recognize workplace dangers
- install caution signs to warn workers about potential hazards

WORKERS' COMP DECISIONS

PTD benefits after doctors cleared her for work?

A nursing assistant with a back injury says she can't do any other jobs and wants permanent total disability (PTD) benefits. Can she collect?

What happened:

The nursing assistant, who worked for the same nursing home for 40 years, hurt her back at work. She complained of severe pain in her back and legs, but her doctors eventually cleared her for sedentary work, which she claimed she couldn't do. She did not seek further medical help for her continuing pain.

Company's reaction: Work that suited your condition was offered, but you refused.

Decision: She couldn't collect. The court found she was cleared for work and there was no medical evidence to support her PTD claim.

Cite: *Robertson v. Montana State Fund*, MT Workers' Comp Court, No. 2020-4988, 3/16/21.

Injured on shuttle bus: Can she collect benefits?

A worker was injured while riding a shuttle bus. Can she collect?

What happened: The worker parked in a parking space, then rode her employer's shuttle bus the rest of the way to work. The bus struck a curb hard enough to injure her, but she didn't report the incident right away because the symptoms weren't immediate.

Company's reaction: Your injury didn't happen at work.

Decision: She could collect. Despite discrepancies in her story, the court found ample evidence of a work injury.

Cite: *W. Penn Allegheny Health System Inc. v. WCAB (Cochenour)*, Commonwealth Court of PA, No. 85 CD 2020, 4/16/21.

REAL PROBLEMS, REAL SOLUTIONS

When Notice of Violations isn't received

Federal OSHA gives employers 15 business days from receipt of its citations and penalties to abate the violations, request an informal conference or contest them. Some state-plan states give employers 20 days.

Here's an example of how important those 15 or 20 days can be.

OSHA visited an employer in Tennessee in December 2019.

The first attempt to deliver a Notice of Violations was on May 30, right at the six-month limit for OSHA to do so.

May 30, 2020, was a Saturday and the business was closed. The U.S. Postal Service didn't leave anything to say they tried to deliver the NOV.

The second delivery attempt was on June 22, which was a Monday, but it was after 5 p.m. and the business was closed.

The third attempt was on July 3. Since July 4 was a Saturday, the business was closed on July 3 for the Independence Day holiday.

The fourth delivery attempt on July 10 was successful.

However, by that time, it was already weeks beyond their original abatement date, June 22.

No wiggle room

By July 10, the company had already been assessed a late fee, and they were denied an informal conference with OSHA because they were outside of the 20 days from their abatement date.

We contacted Tennessee OSHA, and they said the employer was avoiding the mail so they wouldn't receive their citation. TN OSHA said there was nothing they could do.

Without the informal conference available, the company wasn't able to plead its case to OSHA.

If this had been a case with a high penalty – above \$100,000 – we'd probably advise the company to get a lawyer involved and take some action.

Fortunately for this employer, the penalty amount was very low, so it made sense to just pay the fine instead of paying for a lawyer.

Federal and state OSAs take the 15- or 20-day period for responding to the NOV very seriously. They don't give you any wiggle room.

So, if you receive a visit from OSHA and are expecting fines, please alert your office staff to be on the lookout for the NOV in the mail. Responding to it promptly can make a big difference.

(Based on a presentation by Andrea Collins, Risk Management Consultant, KPA, Knoxville, TN, at VPPPA's Safety+ Symposium 2021)

Impact of personal stress on safety

If a safety manager doesn't understand what stress means to workplace safety, you're setting up your employees for failure.

Here's how we discovered how big a factor stress is to safety.

Check the data

We implemented a human factors program and did an analysis, looking at incidents and putting them into a human factors model.

First, when looking at an unsafe act, we decided if it was an error or a violation.

But it's critical not to stop at that point.

You need to look at preconditions that may have caused that employee to make that error.

What we found was, the No. 1 bucket we classified incidents by preconditions was adverse mental states.

Stress and its effects on safety aren't talked about enough.

We need to bring it to the forefront more often as safety professionals because it absolutely has an impact on our losses – sometimes our more serious losses.

(Based on a presentation by Jim Olson, VP Safety, Republic Services, Mesa, AZ, at the ASSP's Safety21 Conference)

TRAINING TIPS

Forklift loads: Be aware of these potential hazards

Forklifts are common pieces of equipment found in use across many industries, handling a variety of different loads of varying sizes and weights.

One thing all forklift operations have in common is that operators must be aware of:

- off-center loads that may cause tipover or falling loads
- overloading that may cause tipover or falling loads, and
- damaged or loose loads.

To prevent a forklift from becoming unstable, and potentially causing it to tip over, operators should:

- secure the load so it is safely arranged and stable
- center the load as nearly as possible
- distribute the heaviest part of the load nearest the front wheels of the forklift
- not overload the stated capacity of the forklift, and
- use the load extension backrest.

Unapproved equipment modifications can kill

Equipment should never be modified without prior approval from the manufacturer to ensure modifications won't interfere with safe operation.

OSHA recently fined an Ohio paint manufacturer after an improperly altered kettle reactor vessel caused an explosion that killed one worker and injured eight more.

The vessel released a flammable vapor cloud when its manway cover and gasket failed, causing the cloud to flow throughout the plant.

Modifications to any kind of equipment have the potential to lead to disaster, so consulting with the manufacturer first is a must.

CALIFORNIA

Cal/OSHA introduces 2 new violation categories

California is cracking down on safety and health violations with two new violation categories, bringing it in line with federal standards and expanding upon them.

Governor Gavin Newsom signed a bill into law Sept. 28, creating two new categories of Cal/OSHA violation: “egregious” and “enterprise-wide.”

Both categories carry big fines for employers. How big? Up to \$134,334 per violation.

However, egregious violations can lead to even bigger fines “because each exposed employee will be considered a separate violation,” according to law firm Greenberg Traurig.

The law and its new violation categories take effect Jan. 1, 2022.

Egregious violations

California’s egregious violations are similar to federal OSHA’s in that these citations are typically reserved for employers who consciously do nothing to eliminate known violations or if the violation leads to fatalities, a large number of injuries or a worksite catastrophe.

Enterprise-wide violations

The other new violation category, enterprise-wide violations, does not

have a federal OSHA counterpart. Federal OSHA can only get corporate-wide abatement through negotiated settlements.

California’s new law creates a rebuttable presumption that an employer with multiple worksites has committed an enterprise-wide violation if:

- the employer’s written procedures on certain topics or issues aren’t in compliance, or
- there’s evidence of a pattern or practice of the same violation committed by the employer at more than one of its worksites.

Citation stands: General contractor controlled site

A general contractor has to pay a \$145,858 fine for fall safety violations after a judge with the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission found it exercised control over a multi-employer worksite.

Premier Roofing was working at a residential construction site when an OSHA inspector arrived to investigate a complaint regarding fall protection. The inspector observed and

photographed multiple employees who either weren’t wearing any fall PPE or were wearing it without being tied off to an anchor point.

In court, the company insisted the employees in question were “interlopers” hired by a subcontractor and that it was unable to control their actions.

The judge disagreed, finding that Premier was in control of all the work so was responsible for site safety.

CSB: ‘Hot work’ doesn’t just mean ignition sources

A Sept. 21, 2020, double fatal fire at the Evergreen Packaging plant was caused in part by a contractor’s lack of understanding of the term “hot work,” according to the Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board.

The contractor, Blastco, used heat guns to help dry a flammable resin used in repairs, but failed to indicate it was engaging in hot work on site. One of the guns fell into the resin, causing it to ignite.

Blastco’s hot work rules only recognized ignition sources that caused sparks, the CSB report states.

SHARPEN YOUR JUDGMENT – THE DECISION

(see case on Page 2)

Yes, Pete’s company won when the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission vacated the citation.

OSHA cited the company, claiming it should have known the employee would breach the minimum approach distance (MAD) to the power line.

The company argued that it took every measure to ensure its experienced crew, who had worked in similar terrain many times before, knew to be extra careful since the MAD could be hard to detect due to the trees and brush.

The commission found the company had no knowledge the worker would end up breaching the MAD, citing all the reminders given while work was being done along with the toolbox talk and the analysis conducted

before work began.

Further, the commission found it was far easier for the employee to see he had breached the MAD from his higher vantage point that it was for the supervisor, who had been on the ground.

■ ANALYSIS: THE VALUE OF REMINDERS

The supervisor in this case gave multiple reminders to his employees about the hazards of the job throughout the course of the work.

Giving reminders is never a bad idea. Will workers think you’re nagging? Maybe, but they’ll still be less likely to forget.

Cite: *Secretary of Labor v. Armstrong Utilities Inc. doing business as Armstrong Cable Services*, Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission, No. 19-0034, 9/24/21. Dramatized for effect.

Government notices on workplace safety

Here's SCA's digest of key notices that appeared recently in the Federal Register (FR) or on OSHA's website concerning workplace safety issues. For the FR listings and other related links, go to [SafetyComplianceAlert.com/category/federal-activities](https://www.safetynewsalert.com/category/federal-activities).

MINING

The Mine Safety and Health Administration has found that none of America's mining operations have met its criteria for pattern of violation (POV) notices, one of the agency's toughest enforcement screenings.

Out of the 12,000 U.S. mining operations, none of them met the criteria showing a pattern of violations.

MSHA's annual screening of operations was conducted from Aug. 1, 2020, to July 31, 2021, and no POV – which would indicate a mine operation posing the greatest risk to miner health and safety – was revealed, according to a Department of Labor news release.

The POV is used to identify mine operators that demonstrated “a recurring pattern of Significant and Substantial (S&S) violations of mandatory health and safety standards at their mines.”

An S&S violation is one that is reasonably likely to result in a serious injury or illness.

The agency provides mine operators with online tools – the POV tool and S&S rate calculator – to help them monitor compliance, informing them how they rate against the screening criteria and when appropriate corrective action needs to be taken.

TRANSPORTATION

Poor decision making on the part of the company and its employees led to the Nov. 30, 2018, death of a railroad worker who was struck by a train.

A track welder and his spotter were assigned to perform maintenance on some rails near Estill, SC.

The crew of the northbound freight train wasn't aware work was being done on the track and didn't see the

welder in time to stop the train.

The National Transportation Safety Board said the probable cause of the incident involved decisions by:

- CSX Transportation management to use train approach warning instead of establishing working limits
- the watchman to stop performing train detection and warning to do other work while the welder was still on the tracks, and
- the welder to remove his high-visibility safety apparel before leaving the work site.

COURT DECISION

On Sept. 3, an administrative law judge with the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission (OSHRC) vacated an OSHA working surface-related citation against a railcar manufacturer that argued the regulation didn't apply to it.

The citation stemmed from a January 2020 inspection when two OSHA inspectors saw employees working on top of railcars at a Greenbriar Central LLC plant without fall protection in areas where they could fall through access holes into the interior of the cars.

This led to the citation for violation of 1910.28(b)(3)(i), which says employees need fall protection to keep from falling through any hole 4 feet or more above a lower level.

The company argued the standard didn't apply, and if it did, that the railcar manufacturing industry didn't receive adequate notice of that fact.

The judge found the standard did clearly apply to the railcar manufacturing industry and should have led to a citation.

However, because of OSHA's published 1996 interpretation of the standard – called the Miles Memorandum, in which the agency said rolling stock was excluded from enforcement of the rule – the judge found the industry did not receive adequate notice that it did technically fall under the standard and vacated the citation.

WHERE TO GET HELP

ASSESSMENT DETERMINES READINESS FOR NEW TECH

The National Safety Council (NSC) released a new free online assessment – via its Work to Zero initiative – to help employers assess their readiness level to embrace new safety technology.

Work to Zero's goal is to reverse the upward trend of workplace fatalities through technology.

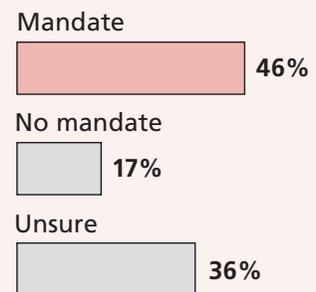
The assessment, “Determining Readiness for Safety Innovation and Industry 4.0,” covers:

- barriers to implementing safety technology
- readiness and the importance of the human mindset
- phases of readiness, and
- readiness to pilot technology.

Info: nsc.org/newsroom/nsc-dekra-unveil-digital-readiness-tool-to-improve

What safety pros say

Are most employers instituting vaccine mandates for their employees?



Source: Gartner Inc.

New federal guidance and COVID's Delta variant combined to shift most executives' stances regarding vaccine mandates, with many now embracing the requirements.

Each issue of SCA contains an exclusive survey to give safety professionals insight into what their peers nationwide are thinking and doing.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Here's a challenging scenario you could encounter. We've asked three of your peers what they'd do. How would you handle it?

Short staffed and behind on a big order: Is OT the answer or a safety nightmare?

The Scenario

Manager Mike Kelly was on his regular safety walk when he suddenly realized how quiet it was in the plant.

Did I forget about a holiday or something? Mike thought.

But as he rounded a corner he saw a single forklift in the distance, turning down another aisle.

He could also hear the sounds of some workers on the dock.

So not a holiday, just a slow day, Mike thought. *But I thought we had a big order to fill.*

'We need overtime'

"Wow, it's quiet out there," Mike said as he walked into the office.

"Funny, we were just talking about that," supervisor Janet Costello said.

"We're short staffed, Mike," Jack Hall, the shipping supervisor, said.

"You mean it's that quiet out there because we've lost that many people?" Mike asked.

"Yes," Janet said. "From what I've read in the news – and from what some of the workers who left told me – a lot of it has to do with the pandemic."

"Who cares why?" Jack asked. "The point is we have a major order to fill and a shortage of workers to get the job done."

"We need overtime, and lots of it," he added.

"Yeah, but too much OT leads to safety-related mistakes, and it sounds like our crew is overworked to begin with," Mike said.

If you were Mike, what would you do?

 Click www.safetycompliancealert.com/category/what-would-you-do/ to see other safety pros' comments on challenging scenarios

Reader Responses

1 Roy McConnell, H&S Coordinator, Veolia North America, Johns Creek, GA

What Roy would do: It's important to remember that people are not robots.

Having employees work extra hours should be done cautiously.

There should be a plan to rotate staff and minimize the potential for incidents to occur when personnel work longer than the normal shift.

Reason: It may be beneficial for the company to house employees or provide hotel accommodations and other such considerations.

This would help to minimize the potential for incidents associated with exhausted employees as they travel to and from their homes.

2 Gregg Richley, Safety & Training Manager, Ajax Tocco Magnethermic Co., Warren, OH

What Gregg would do: A Manufacturer plant exists to manufacture.

I don't see any company turning down orders, so I believe they will work the OT regardless.

Reason: As for safety, plan on the safety manager being on the plant floor more often.

Or an outside safety consultant could be hired to be out on the plant floor until things settle down a bit.

If toolbox talks aren't used, consider instituting them on a daily, or at least weekly basis.

Offering an extra break or longer lunch could also help to ease the strain.

OUTSIDE THE LINES

THINGS THAT GO BOOM: SAFELY BLOWING STUFF UP

Instead of making sure things don't explode, some safety pros got the chance to make sure things exploded safely during the pandemic.

This was part of a study on medieval gunpowder conducted by chemists and historians at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY.

Researchers studied the explosive power of "nearly two dozen gunpowder recipes used by medieval gunners between 1338 and 1460," according to the *NY Times*.

The research is meant to help historians in studying medieval texts and determining if recipes were crafted with deliberate intent.

The story points out that researchers were "accompanied by a number of safety officers."

And you thought "exploding safely" was an oxymoron.

Did you know ...

PPE should be stored properly to prevent damage



OSHA says PPE needs to be stored in a way that it won't become damaged or unusable.

Source: OSHA

Improper storage of PPE can render it unsafe to use. For example, storing a half-face respirator incorrectly could cause the mask to warp, making it fit poorly.

This feature in each issue of SCA charts trends in national workplace safety and health to help safety professionals perform their jobs.