Creating the Right Safety Orientation for Your Workplace

1. **Evaluate the employee’s training needs.** For new employees, a good starting point for training is to compare the employee’s job description to the job hazards. If your organization does not have job descriptions, now is the time to develop them. The job descriptions should summarize all the hazards the employee will be exposed to, the control mechanisms for those hazards and contact information for the direct supervisor, if the employee requires assistance or has questions.

Not every employee may need a full new-hire orientation. For example, if the employee is returning to the job after a period of absence, the employee may not need to review the organization contact information or certain organization policies or procedures. A simple one-on-one interview with the returning employee will tell the orientation trainer whether or not the returning employee has the necessary information about a specific topic.

An organization or trainer should never presume or take for granted that all employees returning to the workforce after a period of absence will be thoroughly familiar with all the policies, procedures and codes of practice for their department(s) or the entire organization. It is up to the organization to assess all returning employees’ knowledge of the organization’s health and safety management system and provide the necessary training to the employees who need thorough orientation training.

2. **Develop a plan to train employees.** If possible, orientation training should be a one-on-one process. Although it may seem time consuming, one-on-one training allows the trainer to spend adequate time with the new employee to review all the necessary information to ensure the employee is knowledgeable about how to do his/her job safely.

- Plan to sit down with the new employee and personally review policy and procedure documents.
- Take the new employee on a personal tour of the facility, detailing items such as introductions to co-workers and staff, emergency exits, first aid stations and demonstrations of the organization’s processes.
- New employees should demonstrate to their trainer that they understand how to complete processes and the trainer should evaluate (at that time) the new employee’s ability and provide further direction, if needed.
- Having demonstrated organization processes to the new employee, the employee should be assigned a “buddy.” This person should be someone from the department who is very familiar with the organization’s policies and procedures. The employee’s buddy should act as a mentor, not as a supervisor. Under no circumstances is an employee’s buddy a replacement for management’s responsibility to ensure the new employee’s safety. The buddy is not legally responsible for the employee and supervisors must stress to new employees that if they find themselves in need of additional assistance, it is up to the employee to speak to his or her supervisor.
3. Evaluate the employee’s progress. Within the first week, the new employee should meet with his/her supervisor to go over the employee’s performance and comfort level on the job. Too often, new employees are left on their own and not questioned about their comfort level with the job, asked to demonstrate their ability to do the job nor questioned about the organization standards.

At the end of the first week and periodically thereafter, the supervisor should have a face-to-face conversation with the new employee and ask the employee direct questions about his/her new role: “Is there any task or part of the job you find difficult or are struggling with?” “Is there any additional assistance or training I can offer you?” Or, “Can you show me how to proceed in this situation?”

Maintaining open lines of communication and keeping in touch with new employees is crucial to the employee’s success in a new job.

4. Recognition or correction. By the end of the organization’s probationary period for new hires, the new employee should have a face-to-face performance review, including things such as ability to work in teams, ability to meet deadlines, adherence to organization policies and procedures (including safety), and possible areas for improvement.

It is crucial that if supervisors believe a new employee needs additional training or direction, the employee has the opportunity to correct past mistakes and be given the opportunity to attend or receive additional training. Turning a blind eye to mistakes an employee is making (intentional or unintentional) not only puts that employee at risk but may also be putting others at risk. Supervisors cannot presume mistakes will be self-corrected. If an employee is not following policy or procedure, supervisors should review it again.

Under due diligence, supervisors are responsible to either correct employees who do not follow standards or take disciplinary action with that employee. If disciplinary action is required, supervisors should document the situation and proceed with the organization’s directives for the situation.

5. Documentation. All orientation training records of new employees should be kept on hand at the employer’s place of business for at least five years. Orientation documents should be filed in the employee’s personnel file along with all his/her training records. OSHA’s health and safety officers have the right to ask for and review the employee orientation training records at any time, therefore the documents should be readily accessible.