Continuously Improve for Safety Excellence

What Is Continuous Improvement?

Continuous improvement is a quality management concept that starts with the assumption that quality can always be improved.

The goal of continuous improvement is to identify and eliminate EVERY defect, error, inefficiency and process variation, rather than accepting a "reasonable" level of imperfection.

Benefits of Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement can help organizations:

- Remain competitive
- Provide superior products and services
- Protect the health and safety of employees
- Meet or exceed governmental or other industry compliance
- Apply standard principles to address any issue
- Improve product and service quality
- Improve efficiency and productivity
- Increase employee job satisfaction and morale and decrease turnover
- Increase employee health and safety ownership at all levels

Continuous Improvement Workflow

The continuous improvement workflow is:

- Plan
 - Recognize an opportunity and plan a change
- Do
 - Test the change with a small-scale study
- Check
 - Review the test, analyze the results and identify what you've learned
- Act
 - If the change did NOT work in the small study, go through the cycle again with a different plan
 - If the change DID work in the small study, incorporate what you learned on a wider scale
 - Use what you learned to plan new improvements, beginning the cycle again

Lagging and Leading Indicators

Lagging indicators are metrics that measure and group safety and health data and results from the past, such as:

- Incident rates
- Lost work days

- Workers' compensation claims
- Losses

Leading indicators focus on present conditions, behaviors and variables that predict future events. They can help us track and correct errors, process flaws and other potential shortcomings *before* serious incidents, injuries and illnesses occur.

Monitoring leading indicators allows you to:

- Highlight the importance of employee efforts to prevent injuries and illnesses
- Improve accountability
- Give credit for work well done
- Take corrective action before an incident, injury or illness occurs

Leading indicators tend to measure ACTIVITIES people can CONTROL.

By looking at both leading AND lagging indicators, a company can tell if its efforts are producing desired results.

The shift to add leading indicators to lagging indicators requires:

- Investing more resources in inspections and observations
- Shoring up reporting practices
- Creating an early reporting culture
- Defining safety systems
 - People responsible
 - Activities performed
 - Means to measure effectiveness

How Quality Management Improves Safety Performance

Companies should consider their workplace, goals and personnel when choosing the tools and combinations of approaches that make sense for them.

For example, they may use:

- Six Sigma
- Lean

- Change management
- Lessons learned

Quality management tools help organizations:

- Improve training effectiveness
- Increase skill level of employees
- Increase employee participation
- Improve the effectiveness of safety management systems
- Investigate incidents sooner