



**OLYMPUS**  
RISK INSIGHTS

## Safety Incentive Programs

Unfortunately, employees and members of the public get hurt at our facilities. Alas, solutions to this problem are not always simple. Effectively reducing the probability of workplace incidents and third-party injuries and property damage requires a comprehensive approach to safety and risk awareness.

Ergonomics, engineering, biomechanics, industrial hygiene, inspections, and other areas of occupational safety and health must all be considered in working toward a solution. All of these disciplines focus on the physical workplace and its “fit” with the worker – work tasks are redesigned, layouts altered, tools customized, workstations tailored, tasks analyzed, and new step-by-step processes developed.

The remaining piece, however, is worker performance. If you continue to identify and act on opportunities to optimize the work environment and develop worker capability, but your incident rates haven’t improved, perhaps you’ve forgotten to address the human element at its most basic level – behavior.

Studies have shown that people tend to repeat a behavior that has positive consequences, even if the behavior itself is not productive or “safe.” Are your workers continually removing the guards from their machines, running through the shop, or neglecting to wear their safety goggles, or cutting corners for the sake of time, speed or efficiency? It may be because they are praised or otherwise rewarded for something other than safety (e.g., speed).

At-risk behavior can have positive, if unintended, consequences for the person performing it. The net result is that the behavior is repeated. A program to reward safe performance is one way to focus on and reinforce safe behaviors. When well designed and administered, a Safety Incentive Program can contribute greatly to your overall incident prevention efforts.

## Why Incidents Happen

When a worker is injured on the job, the first natural question is “What factors contributed to this?” Incidents reflect discrepancies in the workplace; in other words, something in the worker’s environment was not right. Most incidents can be attributed to one or more of the following three basic discrepancies:

1. Environmental Discrepancies: the equipment/methods available were not optimum for the task to be completed productively.
2. Capability Discrepancies: the worker was not able, did not know how, or did not know why to perform the task as intended.
3. Motivation Discrepancies: the worker knew the proper technique and had the proper equipment, but failed to perform the job as intended.

Employers can ensure that workers are thoroughly trained in safe procedures; they can provide appropriate, well-conditioned tools and personal protective equipment (PPE). While performance discrepancies can be more challenging to control, positive consequences for safe, productive behaviors can be managed. How can you “make” your employees work safely?

## Why People Fail to Perform Safely

It’s really quite simple... people fail to perform safely because their immediate work environment does not support the safe behavior. Behavioral psychologists have explored two factors that influence behaviors: antecedents and consequences.

Antecedents are the factors that occur before the behavior and influence its occurrence. Consequences are the factors that follow a behavior and influence the probability of the behavior occurring again. Consequences, whether positive or negative, are extremely powerful in shaping human behavior. The most successful behavioral change programs focus on rewarding positive behavior rather than punishing negative behavior. If you can identify the consequences in your workplace that support unsafe behavior and replace them with new consequences that encourage safe behavior, then you can begin to decrease performance discrepancies.

## Establishing Your Incentive Program

Safe Incentive Programs or Safety Performance Reward Programs can fail, or seriously backfire, if they are poorly planned or executed. For example, consider what might happen if your program consisted of rewarding workers each time they collectively achieved 30 days without an incident. The safe workers would be punished for the unsafe acts of others (if an incident occurred that negated the reward), and all workers would be likely to underreport incidents to avoid spoiling the group's record.

Possible Rewards:

- Awards or letters of commendation
- Hats or logo apparel
- Gift cards for experiences
- Job selection preference
- Lunches
- Mugs
- Participation in special programs
- Points which can be accumulated and exchanged for larger rewards
- Preferred parking
- Special apparel
- Tickets to events

It is appropriate to provide group rewards for achieving major safety goals, but most of the rewards in an effective Safe Performance Reward Program should be small, frequent, and based on specific, individual acts of safety.

## Steps for a Successful Incentive Program

To ensure the best chance for success, follow these eleven steps when establishing your reward program.

- 1. Incorporate safety Rewards into Other Reward Programs:** Nothing sets up a safety reward program to fail faster than one that creates competing contingencies for the worker. Competing contingencies can be thought of in terms of rewards available to employees from different programs your organization might be promoting. If the rewards available for safety are smaller, of less value, offered less often, and are more difficult to achieve than other rewards (say, bonuses for production or quality, or recognition for meeting attendance records), employees will direct their behaviors toward the easiest, largest reward possible to the exclusion of other rewards. Therefore, it is advised that one reward program be offered to employees that incorporates meeting performance and behavioral objectives for all key organizational measures, rather than setting up individual programs that may compete.
- 2. Get Employees Involved from the start:** Include workers in the construction, selection and delivery of the reward system. Conduct a "Reward Survey" to find out what behaviors employees think should be rewarded, and what kinds of rewards they would like. Update the survey periodically.

3. **Use Specific, Measurable Criteria:** Determine specific criteria for which employees can earn rewards. Supervisors must be able to objectively measure each worker's performance against the criteria. Examples might include: using appropriate PPE on a specific job (e.g., safety goggles, hearing protectors, gloves, safety footwear, respiratory protection, etc.); checking guards before starting up a certain machine; seeking immediate first aid for even a minor injury; removing debris found blocking an aisle; or keeping someone in attendance at a spill while supplies are obtained for immediate cleanup.
4. **Reward Individual Behaviors:** The bulk of your program must focus on individual behaviors. Long-term goals such as incident rates and other injury statistics should be established and recognized, but they are not under the direct control of the individual worker. Give rewards to individuals for productive behaviors that they are observed performing that contribute to projects underway. Celebrate completion of projects by teams/departments that contribute to outcomes sought, and of course, cite these completed projects when celebrating achievement of the outcome goals.
5. **Link Rewards Directly to Behaviors:** Workers must know what the reward is for, so state specifically why the reward is being given, citing the value or contribution of the observed behavior. Rewards to individuals need not be costly. In fact, more frequent lower cost rewards are usually more effective than higher cost items given less frequently.
6. **Deliver Rewards Quickly:** A consequence should occur as closely to the behavior as possible to maximize its impact on future behavior. Deliver small, frequent rewards as the safe behaviors occur.
7. **Reward as Many People as Possible:** Make sure everyone has an opportunity to earn rewards, and tender the rewards to as many people as possible. More probable rewards have a stronger impact on behavior than less probable ones.
8. **Use a Variety of Rewards:** Reward programs sometimes fail because people are not interested or perceive no value in the types of rewards available. Something different makes each one of us tick; what "does it" for one person may not "do it" for another. One solution is to create a "reward menu" with a large and varied selection. Our list of possible rewards can help you get started, but use your imagination and the employee surveys to keep rewards fresh and appealing.
9. **Keep it simple and Fun:** The most successful reward programs are, on the surface, also the simplest. The less complicated the program, the better the chances that all workers will understand and participate in it, and that the safe behaviors will occur consistently. And remember to keep it fun! If it's not fun, it won't work. Launch the program with a big kick-off meeting to let everyone know the "rules," and to show that the program has the support of management.
10. **Publicize the Names of Recipients:** Use newsletters, posters, and other announcement techniques to let everyone know who the exemplary performers are. This tactic can encourage others.

**11. Follow through!** Nothing kills a reward program as quickly as a failure to deliver the promised rewards. Make a commitment to follow through with all aspects of the program. It may seem frivolous, but an effective Safe Performance Reward Program can play a very important role in workplace incident prevention.

