



Real-Life Stories

Case Study: Developing Southern Company's Lockout-Tagout Program

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Southern Company is a nationally recognized provider of energy, fiber optics and wireless communications solutions and is ranked among the top utilities in Fortune's annual "World's Most Admired Companies" list for electric and gas utilities.

Southern Company provides clean, reliable and affordable energy to nine million customers through its subsidiaries. Operating nearly 200,000 miles of electric transmission and distribution lines and more than 80,000 miles of natural gas pipeline, Southern Company brands are known for reliability and innovation.

As America's premier energy company – and ranked among the top employers nationally by Forbes – Southern Company is committed to providing a safe work environment for employees and continuously implements best-in-class safety procedures to ensure OSHA compliance.

Goals & Analysis

Switching from Tagout to Lockout-Tagout Program

To improve overall employee safety across 95 of the company's plants and facilities, Southern Company Generation made the decision to switch from a tagout-based safety program to a lockout-tagout (LOTO) program. After reaching out to colleagues in the utility industry and understanding their safety programs, Southern Company concluded it could improve overall safety by implementing a LOTO program that included lockout devices that prevent the start-up of machinery while maintenance activities are occurring.

Criteria for switching to a LOTO program included finding a partner that has 1) the ability to support large-scale operations; 2) a safety product portfolio that supports various utility maintenance tasks, including maintenance on electric, gas and power equipment; and 3) identification methods that make lockout equipment distinguishable for employees in different departments.

Solution

Southern Company tasked David Whitman, Hydro Operations and Maintenance Manager for Georgia Power (a Southern Company subsidiary), with implementing a LOTO program across 95 facilities within its network subsidiaries, including Southern Company Generation, Southern Power and Southern Company Gas.

Southern Company partnered with The Master Lock Company based on the safety leader's reputation for providing end-to-end safety solutions and services. The Master Lock Company worked closely with Southern Company to evaluate its safety needs and made recommendations on lockout devices and safety padlocks to increase the efficiency and safety of maintenance tasks.

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The following are solutions and procedures put in place to address Southern Company's safety challenges:

Access to Lockout Equipment

While a tagout solution is an approved procedure under OSHA regulations for the utility industry, lockout provides an added layer of safety by providing a keyed mechanical solution that prevents unexpected start-up of machinery or equipment. By combining procedures into a LOTO program – one that involves both lockout and tagout – employees are better able to recognize when maintenance is taking place while providing workers with the peace of mind that the equipment will remain de-energized until the lockout device is removed using their key.

To implement LOTO across its generating facilities, Southern Company evaluated all areas where tagout was previously applied and determined the number of physical lockout devices needed across facilities. More than 170,000 safety products were ordered as a result, including Master Lock safety padlocks, group lock boxes and other LOTO devices, making it easier for employees to access lockout

equipment and perform LOTO procedures.

Increasing Safety Efficiency

In a time-intensive industry like utilities, it was important for Southern Company to maintain efficiency when conducting LOTO procedures. And with more than 170,000 safety devices being implemented across 95 facilities, this meant finding safety solutions that 1) kept lockout devices organized and readily available, 2) were identifiable by work department or maintenance task; and 3) ensured any new padlocks ordered would not create a key duplication situation within the facility, thus maintaining the 'one person, one lock, one key' accepted practice.

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