



Safety

Netting Safety Dividends from a Kimberly-Clark Professional Walk-Through

James Langford | Apr 04, 2024

Sometimes, all that's required to improve workplace safety and sustainability is a different set of eyes.

Which is what the experts at *Kimberly-Clark Professional* provide with walk-through assessments for businesses including machine shops and manufacturing facilities.

Such on-site evaluations can deliver a variety of benefits, safety professionals say, from identifying potential operating risks to improving sanitation practices that can help prevent contamination and infection. They also demonstrate to regulators a good-faith effort to provide hazard-free workplaces required under the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act.

"We work with customers to study their processes, where those processes break down and, holistically, how we can help them with their efficiencies and worker safety," explains Eddie Purser, regional safety and sustainability specialist with Kimberly-Clark Professional. "Injuries are a major concern in manufacturing, and they can be very expensive."

Their number is also increasing. Annual on-the-job injuries climbed 4.5 percent to 2.3 million in 2022, the most recent year for which data is available, according to the *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*. Injuries and illnesses combined, meanwhile, rose 7.5 percent to 2.8 million.

While the costs haven't yet been calculated, the National Safety Council *estimated* that they reached \$167 billion the year before, including 103 million lost workdays.

Comfort and Compliance

Using appropriate personal protective equipment, from goggles to respirators and gloves, can help keep employees safe and reduce the number of injuries, experts agree, but it has to be **worn correctly**.

"One of the things I focus on with PPE is that comfort drives compliance," Purser explains. "If injuries are occurring because people aren't complying with policies on what they're supposed to be wearing,

why is that? Is it not comfortable? Can we get a better solution that will drive higher compliance from workers, which will equal fewer incidents and a safer workplace?"

Before beginning a walk-through, Purser says, he meets with customers to determine what they're hoping to accomplish.

"I want to learn why I'm there," he adds. "What are their hot-button issues at the moment? Has there been an injury, or is it an open-book assessment?"

Once a safety assessment begins, Purser says, he might examine the types of safety gloves in use, their sizes, thickness and material, and the types of hazards they're meant to counter. The same tactics would apply to respirators, safety glasses and gowns, all products that are available through Kimberly-Clark Professional.

"It may cost more to buy a pair of safety glasses that sit comfortably on workers' faces rather than something big and bulky that's really cheap," he says. "But if they don't fit well, workers are less likely to wear them. I've seen a worker with safety glasses pushed to the top of his head because they were uncomfortable, literally standing behind a sign stating that eyewear must be worn at all times in that area."

That leaves the worker far more susceptible to an eye injury, which can lead to lost workdays and expose the company to workers' compensation claims as well as regulatory fines, potentially wiping out any savings from lower-cost glasses.

"During a walk-through, we can identify risks like that and show customers the value of using something better," he says. "Yes, you pay more upfront, but it's going to last longer, and it will save you money in the long run."

That's the goal of Kimberly-Clark Professional's *top-selling Nemesis™ and Maverick™ safety glasses*, for example, which emphasize style and fit along with state-of-the-art protection from workplace hazards.

"You want people to be compliant so that they can go home the way they showed up at work—uninjured," Purser says.

Workplace Sanitation and Hygiene

The same value principle applies to sanitation and hygiene equipment, he says. Large soap jugs with hand pumps may be less costly to purchase for hand-washing stations than dispensers, but they also put out several times the amount of sanitizer with each use—much of which may be unneeded.

"That can amount to a lot of waste, so just making a switch from a hand pump to an electronic soap dispenser," such as Kimberly-Clark Professional's *ICON™*, can save money, Purser says.

Bathroom assessments often provide valuable insights into sustainability and potential waste, he adds.

Inefficient paper towel dispensers, for example, may give users several more towels than they need, leading to unsightly piles around waste bins and frequent towel shortages.

"If we can supply new dispensers that dispense towels properly so that your employees can actually wash their hands and then dry them, they're probably a lot happier and cleaner and there's less sickness," he says. "With public-facing businesses, we say that your restroom is your calling card but even in an industrial setting, if the restroom is in a shambles, it equals unhappy employees who are generally less productive."

Other checkpoints in a hygiene assessment include bath and facial tissue dispensers and industrial wipes.

Continuous Improvement

In manufacturing facilities, workers are frequently cleaning up fluids, Purser says, sometimes using laundered shop towels, rags and cut-up T-shirts, which aren't very effective.

"We like to show them things that can be more effective," he says, such as Kimberly-Clark Professional's WypAll® disposable wipes, which come in a variety of types and strengths, leave surfaces cleaner and make cleanup quicker.

Along with being more effective, some of the wipes—and all of the PPE gear—can be recycled through the company's RightCycle™ platform.

Not only does the program keep nonhazardous waste out of landfills, it gives users the ability to track how much they've recycled throughout the year and demonstrate their progress toward *sustainability goals*.

Overall, Purser says, walk-throughs give businesses a chance to evaluate their decision-making on a variety of purchases and determine whether they're getting what they need.

"With PPE, I like to ask, 'How did you decide this was the right product?'" he says. "If they struggle to answer that or just say that it's what they've always bought, then we can take a hard look at what they're using and the hazard they're trying to prevent. Maybe the product they're using is more than what they need for the job. Or maybe they could use something that's more comfortable and breathable. It's important to have a mindset of continuous improvement."

How could safety walk-throughs benefit your business? Tell us in the comments below.