

Workplace Safety

Strategies To Help Metal Service Centers Keep Safety First

Brought To You By Lenox Industrial | Dec 31, 2018

Safety is one of those issues that every manufacturer knows is important, yet as evidenced by the unending list of *OSHA fines*, it is pretty clear that it often slips through the cracks. Even big name companies like Exxon can fall short.

Put simply, your manufacturing operation can never be too safe. Like any other process or initiative, safety should be approached with continuous improvement in mind. This means that service centers, as well as any other manufacturing operation, need to continually reevaluate their safety procedures and processes to look for areas for improvement.

The manufacturing industry as a whole is promoting this type of mentality, knowing that “safety first” needs to be more than just an underlying principle. It needs to be an ongoing, active practice. The Metals Service Center Institute (MSCI), for example, recently teamed up with the National Safety Council to offer ongoing, relevant safety tools and resources to its members. “Advocating for an industry-wide safety culture is a critical part of all that we do at MSCI,” said M. Robert Weidner, III, MSCI president & CEO.

To help service centers keep safety at the forefront, the LENOX Institute of Technology (LIT) has researched some best practices being used by industry leaders. Read below to discover some safety strategies and the additional benefits they can bring to your service center:

- **Implement Ongoing Safety Training.** Almost every manufacturer requires new hires to undergo initial safety training; however, it doesn't take long for an operator to take safety for granted and minimize its importance. That's why many companies are starting to expand their safety training requirements. McInnes Rolled Rings, a forging operation featured in *Forging* magazine, says that instead of just requiring new employees to have basic safety training session on Day 1, it now requires additional safety training on Day 8, Day 30, Day 60 and Day 90. In addition, the company tells *Forging* that it conducts annual safety training for all associates (including office personnel) and has team leaders conduct “Toolbox Talks” throughout the year.
- **Use Visual Devices.** Don't underestimate the power of visual safety reminders. LENOX Tools, for example, has implemented a Safety Sticker program, which visually displays whether or not its operation has had any safety incidents. Sticker-dispensing stations and a safety calendar are located at every entrance to the facility, and every employee is required to put on a green sticker with the number of days “accident free” written on it. When a recordable accident occurs, everyone in the facility changes from a green sticker to a red sticker for a seven-day period. After seven days, everyone reverts back to the green sticker. According to LENOX, the program has been “a good rallying point for the facility and builds energy around safety.”
- **Leverage Mobile Technology.** Another way to encourage and enforce safety procedures is to utilize mobile technology. As discussed in *this article* from LNS Research, a growing number of manufacturers are using mobile devices and apps that require operators to log in before using a particular machine, either as part of training or everyday tasks. Once logged in, the system can validate if that operator has completed a required training, read an update to a quality specification, and so on. If that person has not done so, the system will not let him or her proceed. Many companies are also utilizing digital checklists. Shops can use this digital approach to keep a record of what items an operator has checked off, as well as anything that has to be overridden on the checklist for a process to move forward (for auditing purposes).

- **Undergo an Ergonomic Study.** According to the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA), ergonomics is defined as fitting a person to a job to help lessen muscle fatigue, increase productivity, and reduce the number and severity of work-related injuries. By making ergonomic improvements, your operation will almost automatically be safer. That was the case for California-based Earle M. Jorgensen Company (EMJ), featured in a white paper from LIT. After performing an in-depth ergonomic study at one of its metalworking facilities, EMJ made several changes on the shop floor, including repositioning band irons and adjusting the height of staging tables. As a result, the service center was able to reduce employee injuries, improve operator efficiency, and increase output.
- **Track Near Misses.** As *Modern Machine Shop* reported in a *column* by Wayne Chaneski, one way to increase safety in a manufacturing environment is to report what he calls “near misses.” A near miss is an incident that didn’t result in medical attention or time away from work, but could have. Tracking near misses can predict potential workplace accidents and provide an opportunity to prevent them from occurring in the first place. Some common causes of near misses include electrical cords, hoses, or tubing on the floor; sharp objects inside a drawer; low-hanging objects; unsecured ladders; a hot tool or piece of equipment left out without a warning tag; and improperly secured items in cabinets. According to Chaneski, the best way to track near misses is to encourage employees to report them and to add them as a category during internal safety audits.
- **Talk About It—Often.** Perhaps the best way to reinforce the safety message is to talk about it—a lot. Structural Steel of California, a leading industrial metal-cutting company, is intentional about making sure that employees know that safety is a critical aspect of the metal products it fabricates, and that mindset has evolved into an overall culture of safety within the company’s two North Carolina facilities. The manager holds a safety meeting every morning with the operators and a safety committee meeting every month. In addition to enforcing the safety message, this constant communication provides ample opportunities for the manager to discuss any other production issues that need to be addressed.

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