

## **Pros and Cons of Safety Incentive Programs**

If you're thinking about establishing a safety incentive program, or want to improve an existing one, here are some comments—pro and con—from your colleagues, courtesy of their postings in *Safety.BLR.com's* EHS Forum.

### **Safety Bingo**

"I work for a construction company and we have played Safety Bingo for the last 5 years. Our program is divided up by crew and monetarily driven. Any crew that has a preventable incident/accident, does not wear its PPE, or has equipment damage is disqualified for the month. I pick five numbers every week until someone hits BINGO. The B-Safe winner receives \$200 and each member of his or her crew receives \$40. Some of our crews have more than 30 employees working together. Our shop monitors maintenance and damage and notifies me of any abuse or damage. We were concerned at first that incidents and accidents would not be reported, but this has not happened. Our experience modification (EMOD) rating reflects this. Our program costs our company somewhere between \$6,500–\$8,000 a year. A safety incentive program does not need to be complicated; it just needs buy-in by everyone, and we have accomplished this."

### **Incentive or Disincentive?**

"A lot of these incentive system rewards are based on chance, not on concrete actions. We are deliberating changing our incentive program and some on our committee are tired of having programs in which someone is chosen a winner, spins a wheel, has the right numbers line up, etc. Don't these kinds of incentives end up frustrating those who may have complied and excelled but didn't 'draw a lucky number'?"

### **Safety Bucks**

"We used to have a monthly bonus per department for 'No recordable accidents' but ran into the problem of people not reporting accidents because they didn't want to be responsible for their department losing the safety bonus. So we got together a committee and came up with our Safety Bucks program that works great. We had Safety Bucks printed in different denominations and the employees are rewarded for safety suggestions, hazard recognition, attending safety-related training (such as CPR, accident investigation, etc.), writing job safety analysis (JSA), etc. They are also rewarded for coming up with corrective actions when we do have an accident or incident, and answering safety questions correctly when we have our departmental safety meetings. Then every quarter we purchase prizes using our safety program budget and we have a silent auction. They bid on the prizes with their Safety Bucks. It is a lot of fun and those who don't get a big prize at the auction get smaller safety incentives and can use their 'bucks' at the next auction. That way, no one is 'punished' for an accident and everyone has incentive for prevention. It has worked well for us."

### **Programs "Lagging" Behind?**

"You are wise to be cautious when you think about safety incentive programs. Frequently they become nightmares that cause injury-hiding, entitlement mentality, and more. The biggest problem is that most companies start by rewarding lagging indicators. Safety Bingo and other gimmicks are only effective for a short time."

# **Safety News**

## **Everyday Prevention**

"We created a fun safety incentive program that gives out rewards based on everyday prevention actions. Our program is called 'Busted.' We have raffle tickets, and, as a lead person or supervisor catches any employee doing something safe (perhaps helping a co-worker move a large object without being asked) they give them a ticket. We also engage an 'undercover' employee who observes co-workers. At the end of their 'term,' the safe acts that they have written down in a notebook are evaluated, and tickets are given out at that time. This insures that employees aren't just 'acting' safe in front of supervisors. We then have a bimonthly drawing where one of the winners is picked and given a \$10 gift card. The program is reasonably priced, involves the employees, and it has helped us decrease our sprain/strain and slip/fall incidents tremendously."

## **Competition Leads to Cover-up**

"I have found that competitions between departments can lead to cover-up of near-miss accidents and incidents because the departments do not want to compromise their record. However, I have had a great deal of success in implementing a Safety Improvement Suggestion Program that identifies "Potential" as well as existing issues that require action for mitigation. The Employee Safety Committee then judges the submissions quarterly and issues an award to the individual or team with the best submission. Because this award is coming from a committee made up entirely of their peers and not management, it also bolsters recognition by fellow employees."

## **Awareness-Raising**

"I think the reason most safety incentives fail is that they begin with the wrong premise. Those who hate incentive programs claim, 'I tried them and they did not reduce accidents.' Incentive programs first and foremost raise awareness of safety performance, rather than reduce accidents. Getting employees thinking about safety behavior is the first step to getting employees acting safely. Incentive promotions and programs can deliver that key ingredient if implemented properly and with a clear understanding of purpose."

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