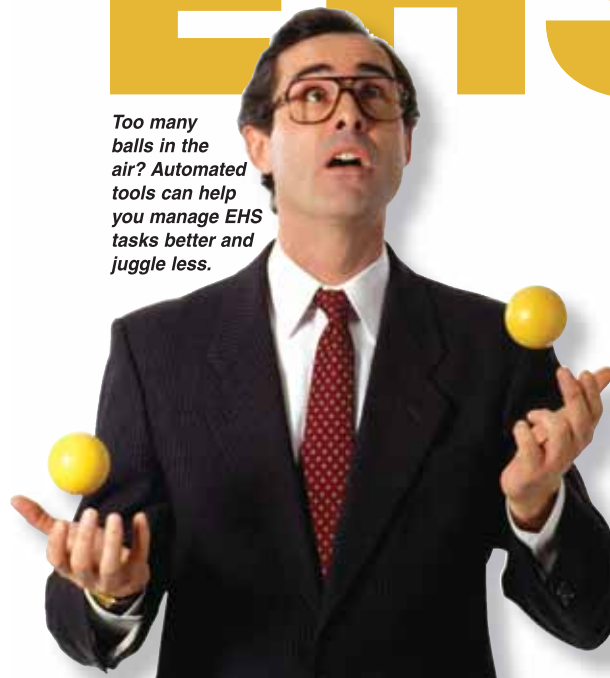


EHS management



Too many balls in the air? Automated tools can help you manage EHS tasks better and juggle less.

tional health and safety expert. “As a result, prevention can get lost in the day-to-day shuffle.”

In order to produce expected results, EHS pros must be resourceful and forward-thinking. Fortunately, technology can help improve efficiency and effectiveness, particularly in two areas. Changes in training delivery and tracking can save time and produce better results. And, when an incident does occur, there are new ways to use technology to respond to and manage cases.

ing can be faster, cheaper and better for both the learner and you.

As for tracking training programs, nowadays Internet-based Learning Management Systems track completions across the enterprise and automate steps like sending assignment or overdue notices. They allow you to manage all training, online or classroom, in one place.

When an incident occurs

When injuries or illnesses occur, the burden of responding, reporting and follow-up begins. But often EHS pros lack

Let new Internet and computer-based tools improve your efficiency

By MARK V. VERMEULEN

Recent surveys of environmental, health and safety professionals confirm that while budgets and headcount are generally stable, responsibilities are growing. Most EHS managers report increased work hours and job stress. Often that stress arises from the need to keep up with urgent matters — employee incidents and injuries, OSHA reporting, recordkeeping and more.

At the same time, important issues — like analyzing current trends, future risks and identifying preventative measures — demand attention but are deferred. “Safety professionals are frequently forced to manage from the rearview mirror,” says Ron A. Kirsch, Ph.D., occupa-

Start with training

A well-trained workforce is critical to keeping employees safe, healthy and on the job. But demands continually grow and change. New processes, employee turnover and multi-lingual staff keep the safety training workload high. Technology-driven alternatives for training delivery and management can be a lifesaver.

Instructor-led training will always be essential. Certain topics mandate nothing less than face-to-face interaction. What’s new is the increasing availability of high-quality online safety training, which is ideal for introducing new subjects, for refresher training and widely needed courses. Good examples include OSHA requirements, like bloodborne pathogens or hazard communication. Training delivered this way is typically more consistent and compliant.

Such training is available on demand for new hires or employee transfers. Because it is self-paced, it adapts to various learning styles or schedules. Courses can often be customized to meet specific requirements. Overall, online safety train-

CASE IN POINT

Harvey Industries, a building materials distributor and manufacturer, has quantified dramatic results of implementing computer-based EHS management tools. “We used to conduct investigations and report handwritten, faxed forms to our carriers that would average 10+ days post-incident,” says Dave Conant, Risk Manager. “Since implementing our integrated system, 80 percent of our claims reach the insurance carrier in zero to three days. Using all of the tools available to us, we’ve cut our mean total disability cost per day from \$533 in 2002 to \$263.”

The company also knows exactly where it stands compared to its competitors. It once was above twice the industry average in disability day rates and lost-time frequency. Today, according to Conant, it is at under half the industry average.

access to information and must await data before they can perform meaningful analysis and corrective action.

New, integrated Internet and/or computer-based software facilitates collecting and sharing information across departments, up and down the organization. This enables EHS and HR staff to

get out of reactive mode and produce better outcomes. Such systems offer:

1 Convenient incident reporting tools — One of the most valuable capabilities is electronic incident reporting. Day-of-injury activity and reporting is vital in successfully managing the outcome of an incident right through return-to-work. Electronic reporting allows you to capture the permanent record of the incident immediately from those closest to the event. Often, reporting occurs at the incident site, rather than back in the office or from a specific computer. So records are likely to be more accurate and timely.

This distributes data entry among all involved, reducing administrative burden and possible bottlenecks. Moreover, it rapidly moves incident data up the food chain so management can proactively evaluate and respond — relying less on that rearview mirror.

2 Automated OSHA reporting — For reportable incidents, the entire process of OSHA reporting can be automated with a few clicks, saving time, improving accuracy and eliminating duplicate entries. Reduced administrative work is coupled with higher compliance rates.

3 Information exchange with third-parties — When a workers' compensation incident occurs, information must typically travel both in and outside the company. Automating this process is a two-way street that yields real efficiency. Initially, it sends the first report of injury electronically to a carrier or administrator. Then automated import routines can reconcile cost information back into the claim records.

Up-to-date information is a powerful tool for independent analysis when combined with consolidated cost data. Standard reports on the nature of injury, cause, incident rates, etc., become more meaningful. Incorporating cost information enables integrated benchmarking on both return-to-work and cost factors. These are just the type of analyses that can make EHS professionals more effective.

4 Return-to-work coordination — One of the most effective strategies for employers is to manage the return-to-work (RTW) process. According to a report by Chandler Consulting Inc., companies can reduce indemnity/time-lost payments and lost days by 25 percent to 50 percent through effective RTW implementation. Technology facilitates successful RTW programs by enabling members of the team to capture, share and evaluate information.

The EHS pro can review and communicate the safety issues concerning the employee's return. When a limited-duty position is prescribed, collecting all the information online, including details about the nature of assignments and restrictions, permits everyone from the physician to the employee to make confident decisions.

As for follow-up, RTW tools give you a common and efficient mechanism to track activities and monitor the progress and effectiveness of transitional work.

5 Performance benchmarking — It is not enough, however, to simply manage these programs more effectively. Actionable data derives from analyzing their performance, both against internal history and to national benchmarks. This

requires readily accessible, accurate information and the proper analytical tools — a strong suit for many technology-based solutions.

An example is the ability to measure against national norms published in the industry standard Official Disability Guidelines (ODG). These guidelines provide evidence-based treatment, duration and cost data for every reportable medical condition. Printed guidelines are cumbersome and time-consuming to use. However, integrated electronically with injury and illness information, you have a valuable analytic tool. You can quickly and effectively measure performance based on guidelines for RTW status, costs relative to industry averages, and even by physician of record or case manager.

Get proactive

EHS pros have more information and tools today to help transform their role from the time-pressured administrative and reactive mode to one that is more proactive and productive. Naturally these tools are not right for every environment. But they can make it possible to refocus on the analytical and preventive activities that reduce risk and improve employee safety and health.

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