

Safety programs and mining companies

How they work in tandem



by Patrick Doyle

It's no secret that there are two schools of thought on safety programs. No matter which side you're on, I hope you will take the time to

read my thoughts on the issue. As an outsider to the mining industry, I think I have a unique perspective on the topic.

In my 15 years as a promotional products distributor, I've co-ordinated, organized and implemented several safety programs at well-known mining companies in Canada. The successes my clients have seen with these programs makes me wonder why more companies don't pursue opportunities to increase loyalty and camaraderie within their companies, while benefiting from the dollar savings of safe work.

Much like the recognition mining companies receive from the WSIB, it's important for employers to recognize their workers for their contributions in creating and maintaining a safe workplace. The mining field is a profession that includes a significant degree of danger. Workers face daily challenges that those of us in offices will never encounter. But we in the office know that the safety of those workers affects your bottom line. That's why you need to invest in safe work.

Do these programs really work? The answer is a resounding "Yes". How do I know? – from the measured results that have been tracked in a broad range of safety programs. I have seen accident rates drop, causing a drop in WSIB claims and rates. I've heard the chatter of employees when they're waiting for their recognition award to arrive. I've also heard employees discussing their award options with

their supervisors. These companies have thus created an open door policy and a more open work environment—an environment that encourages discussion and enables supervisors to be more in touch with their employees.

Safety programs are not designed to change attitudes; they are designed to reward and reinforce positive behaviour. The employer changes the attitudes internally by walking the talk. An effectively administered safety program is one of the tools an employer can use to walk that walk.

Once the decision to create a safety award program is made, the first question clients often ask is, "Why not offer cash?" There are two reasons why cash does not work. First, employees start to rely on that cash and use it as a way to pay bills, rather than recognize it as an award. Secondly, once an employee begins to rely on that cash, if an accident does occur, they are now hit with multiple problems. Medical bills will far outweigh any dollar reward they had been getting in the past, and although the original intent of the cash is for a reward, the loss of that income will create bitter employees.

So what should you offer in place of cash? My clients have chosen a variety of items that have high perceived value with mining employees—everything from camping and fishing gear to canoes and GPS systems.

In order to run an effective program, you need to make sure it is as fair as possible. You always want to make sure the rewards are reachable, desirable and that the employee is recognized in a timely manner. If the program has a lot of stops and starts, or employees don't know what their results will be, then it will soon lose its effectiveness.

Here are a few great ways to keep safety programs top of mind:

- Keep a running track of the safety award

level on pay stubs.

- Have a website where employees can see the different prize levels.
- Keep the awards timely. (Don't delay in getting the award to employee... timeliness is everything.)

Marketing your safety program to outside audiences can gain favourable publicity for you as well. Your company will be seen as a good corporate citizen that is not just after profits, but is willing to make a commitment to people in a potentially very dangerous work environment.

The suggestion that employees won't report accidents due to the effect it would have on their safety award is not an issue. Because safety becomes the centre of attention, and is continually promoted to employees, employees know that they should treat workplace injuries like home injuries. They are encouraged to go to the doctor whenever they need, as the well-being of the employee is the most important thing.

It's important to note that one very distinct challenge with creating a safety award program for mining companies can be location. Due to the distance issues, you really must make sure you work with a distributor who understands and can overcome this challenge. Together, you must carefully consider how the awards are going to be distributed, because often the big courier companies are not going to be your best sources.

CMJ

Patrick Doyle is the owner of Proforma Synergy, a printing and promotional products distributorship located in Pickering, Ont. He can be reached at Patrick.Doyle@proforma.com.