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the Informer

A monthly newsletter addressing workplace safety by Iowa Municipalities Workers' Compensation Association .

Resetting safety culture: Cherokee County's story

By Michelle Rupp Wedmore and the Cherokee County Safety Committee

In early 2013, the Cherokee County Board of Supervisors presented the devastating news that each department was going to need to make substantial budget cuts for the next fiscal year. The reasoning: offset the rising cost of our workers' compensation coverage. This meant employee lay-offs, less money for road projects and office supplies, lower pay increases, etc. The worst part was this news meant our employees were not working carefully or going home safe to their families each night.

In October 2013, our Iowa Municipalities Workers' Compensation Association (IMWCA) loss control representative "encouraged" us to jump start our safety efforts. After electing employees representing each department in the county, our new Safety Committee got to work. Our former safety policy left much to be desired, so we started from scratch. This task initially seemed overwhelming, but organization and communication were the keys to our success.

We started with the Safety Policy itself. IMWCA has great model programs that we followed one section at a time, configuring it specifically to us. These models were extremely beneficial since none of us are safety experts or professional writers. We met monthly until all sections were complete. During this time (as always), it was extremely beneficial to have all departments represented on our safety committee. This ensured the policy was broad enough to cover the whole county, yet narrow enough to be department-specific if necessary. As we completed a section,

we would email it to IMWCA for review and insight as to what works in other counties.

Communication is one of the key factors to our success thus far. That began by re-reviewing the completed safety policy with department heads. Their input not only ensured accuracy but also ensured all employees were given a voice in the policy. Knowing they had a hand in creating it has made it easier



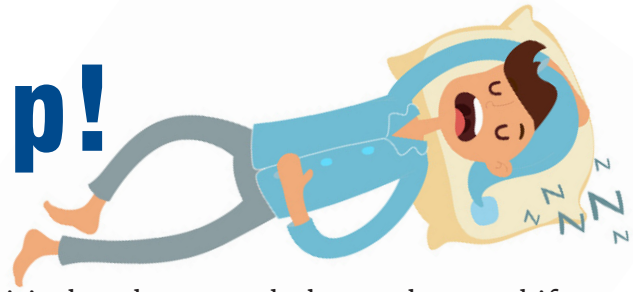
A Cherokee County safety recognition event.

for everyone to abide by the policies. After nine months, numerous meetings and countless emails our Safety Policy was officially adopted in July 2014!

Next began the implementation phase. In a meeting with all department heads we explained the new claims reporting procedures, injury reporting and investigation, Company Nurse, designated healthcare provider, and return to work policies. The large-group meeting was imperative to ensuring expectations were clear and all questions were answered. Shortly after this, all employees were given copies of the policy and asked to return the acknowledgement pages. The safety policy was also put into all new employee packets.

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Ahh...sleep!



A few generations ago we were pretty much an agrarian society. Work days were patterned after the amount of daylight, and we slept through the night. Back then it was fairly easy to get the recommended eight hours of sleep each night.

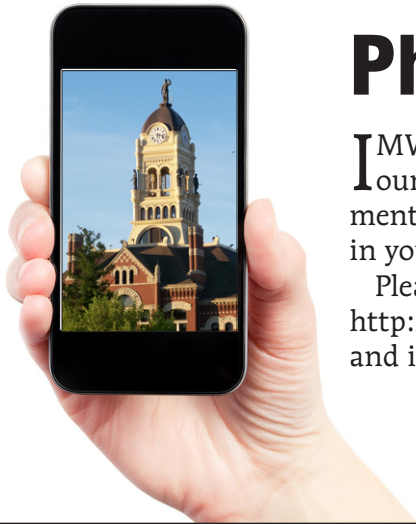
Fast-forward to today. We are truly a 24/7 society and with this change comes another set of challenges. According to the Center for Disease Control sleeping less than seven hours per night is linked to increased risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity and poor mental health, as well as early death. Not getting enough sleep can affect your ability to make good decisions and increase the risk of making mistakes, some that may be life-altering.

Shift workers are at a higher risk for not getting enough sleep, and municipal workers are keenly aware of this fact. Law enforcement, fire and EMS, medical workers and public works crews all work around the clock and are subject to fragmented sleep. Add to that

many municipal workers are asked to work extra shifts when needed to cover a worker shortage; or to respond to natural disaster or clear public streets during a blizzard. All this leads to sleep deprivation, which can lead to placing the employee, and often the public, in jeopardy. This is also true of workers who hold second jobs, which can lead to less sleep and impact the quality of the work they do while at their primary job.

Sleep is as important to our overall good health as diet and exercise. Some habits that can improve your sleep quality include:

- Go to bed at the same time, even on non-work days.
- Ensure your bedroom is quiet, dark and relaxing.
- Remove or restrict distractions like TV, computers and smart phones.
- Avoid large meals, caffeine and alcohol before bedtime.
- Get regular exercise. Being physically active can help you fall asleep more easily when it's time.



Photos wanted for 2017 calendar

IMWCA wants to feature your entity in our 2017 calendar. Have a park, monument, welcome sign or interesting feature in your community? Send us photo!

Please submit the photo online at <http://leagueeditor/Pages/FileBox.aspx>, and include your email address, member

entity name and the word "calendar" in your message.

Only high-resolution images can be used in the calendar. The deadline for submitting photos is September 2. Questions may be directed to bethanycrile@iowaleague.org.

We can't wait to see your photos!



Save the date: One Day Safety University

The 2016 One Day Safety University is set for Tuesday, Oct. 11. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m., and the workshop goes from 9 a.m. to 4p.m. This year, the workshop will be held at the Saylor Township Fire Hall, 211 NW 54th Avenue in Des Moines. Session topics and registration will be announced online later this month.

Hawkeye on Safety

Hawkeye on Safety 2016 is a one-day conference to provide information on health and safety topics in construction and facilities. The event is from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 8 at the Coralville Marriott. Learn more or register at <http://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/heartland/ce/file.asp?ID=610>.

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Early on the Safety Committee decided that training was going to be essential to reducing workplace injuries and lowering our Experience Modification Factor (MOD), thus decreasing workers' compensation rates. Using IMWCA and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) resources we created a list of safety training courses for each specific department. We take advantage of IMWCA's Online University for most of our training. It is extremely user friendly, and it is perfect when you can't gather all employees simultaneously in a classroom. It also lets us easily track everyone's progress throughout the year.

Now that safety expectations were clear to all employees and training was under way, the Safety Committee began department inspections. We created an inspection checklist and use it for department walk-throughs. Each department is inspected annually. The committee uses staff from outside the department, which allows us to notice hazards those who work there each day may overlook. We don't use this process to punish anyone; rather we point out areas for improvement and look for progress being made from year to year. We also introduced Safety Newsletters, a great way to get information out to our employees and keep them informed about changes or updates to policies. The newsletters are also a place to offer "kudos" to individuals or departments that go above and beyond in their safety efforts.

What did all of this mean for us? The most important thing is that our employees are going home safe at night.

IMWCA would like to welcome its newest member to the program.

Thank you to all our members for your loyalty and dedication to safety.

Osceola Water Works

We are extremely thrilled that since we began revamping our safety program, we have only had one employee with an indemnity claim (where they missed more than three days of work because of a work-related injury)! Our employees are all aware of safety standards and hazards and are overall working safer. Financially, this has benefited us as well. Our premium this past year was nearly \$90,000 below the previous year. For a county with approximately 12,000 people, just shy of 100 employees, this number is astronomical. This means more money for county projects, no layoffs and improved employee morale.

Many people have asked about the willingness of employees to work safely; sometimes working safely means taking extra time or properly using equipment even when it seems like a hassle. I have found it is all in the approach. We have an "open door" policy when it comes to safety. At any time employees are encouraged to contact a member of the safety committee with questions, comments, concerns, etc., and these are immediately put on the agenda for the next month's meeting. When implementing new procedures, employees are not simply told WHAT to do, but also WHY it is necessary. We try to utilize real life examples when possible. When an incident does happen, we are quick to investigate and offer solutions to ensure it doesn't occur again. When someone brings an unsafe matter to our attention, we do our absolute best to rectify it immediately. We want all of our employees to know how valuable their input is and how important their safety is to us.

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Comments or suggestions: contact Bethany Crile, newsletter editor, at (515) 244-7282 or bethanycrile@iowaleague.org.

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