



CASE STUDY

Akzo Nobel Improving Safety

Surfactants Europe Sees Management Support for Safety as Critical

Situation

In March 2007, global industry giant Akzo Nobel's Surfactants Europe sub-business unit facility in Stockvik, Sweden, marked three years without a lost time injury (LTI). Site leaders believe their behavior-based safety (BBS) process has been an important factor in attaining this milestone. They recognized the role that behaviors have in incidents and knew they'd have to address how people act if they were to be successful in safety improvement. Facilitator Sven Andersson says, "The biggest problem when it comes to safety is to change people's habits in their daily work. It's difficult to identify a risk in working procedures when you have been doing the same job for years." Site leaders also knew they'd need to obtain management support to sustain good results by the workers.

Solution

The business unit selected BST to help them on the behavioral side of safety and to guide them in developing a strategy for managerial support that would ensure ongoing success. Training in behavior-based safety methods and principles was a critical element in getting the BBS process up and running.

Andersson, who has over two years experience as facilitator for the BBS process, considers data gathering on leading safety indicators to be the heart of the effort. One way for gathering this kind of "upstream" data is to use a systematic observation method. An observation is made by studying someone as they perform a work operation. Once the worker has reached a natural stopping point, the observer discusses with him or her the various safe and at-risk behaviors observed. This personal feedback is an important part of an observation. It serves as a consequence given in real time and, as such, has the capacity to improve overall site safety by reinforcing individual safe actions. Says Andersson, "One often thinks that a technical solution is the answer, when changed behavior often can be key." Rolf Asphäll, QHSE Manager for BU Surfactants, considers the BBS concept as "well thought out" and has begun using the BBS Process Index to help monitor the health of the process.

In the beginning, the process focused on obtaining employee engagement at the shop floor, but there had to be a role for managers, too. Says Surfactants Europe Operations Manager Agneta Gerdner, "If BBS is going to

succeed long-term, we need a strong commitment from our managers as well.” With this in mind, the management team discussed what they could do to maintain worker focus on safety. First, they all trained with BST on their role in the safety process. They assessed their training needs based on competence profiles, data from the observations, and near miss incident reports. They implemented a semi-annual check-up to assess the development of the BBS process at the site, monitor how many employees receive training, audit the number of safety observations, and gauge the percent of safe behaviors occurring on site. In addition, they made sure that contractors were involved in the process observations and began to monitor contractor safety incidents. Convinced of the impact of management on safety, the business unit’s senior leadership participated in executive coaching with BST coaches. Each leader made an individual action plan that would emphasize his or her support for safety. One commitment every manager made was to be more visible at the sites. These various, coordinated management support activities and systems have helped the process maintain excellent safety results.

“If BBS is going to succeed long-term, we need a strong commitment from our managers as well.”

At a Glance:

- Akzo Nobel is a Fortune Global 500 company and is listed on both the Euronext Amsterdam and NASDAQ stock exchanges
- Surfactants, a global business unit of Akzo Nobel, operates in 50 countries, employing 1,100 people
- The surfactants business services a wide range of industries, including agro, petroleum, cleaning, personal care, asphalt and mining

Results and Future Targets

In April 2007, the Stockvik site completed three years without an LTI. There, the process made 211 safety observations over the last year; 11 above their target. Akzo Nobel Surfactants reached a milestone the previous year: 12 months without an LTI. In April 2007, the European sub-business unit reached 1,000,000 work hours (or nearly 16 months) without LTI. The results are a tribute to the commitment of the workers and managers.

Looking forward, the business unit is focused on having everyone implement personal BBS targets, training every site employee to make observations, gaining more data on the areas considered to be more exposed, and gaining buy-in for the process by all contractors. Akzo Nobel has also extended the technology to the Research and Development Department in Stenungsund, and has a structure in place to assist those departments through sharing best practices and experience. With the entire business unit in alignment on safety, they believe they’re headed in a positive direction.