



CASE STUDY

Living the Philosophy of Safety

How Hexion Created a Culture of Care and Safety Leadership Across 60 Sites

Situation

Based in Columbus, Ohio, Hexion is a leading global producer of epoxy specialty resins, modifiers, and curing agents serving the automotive, oilfield, electronics, architectural and industrial coatings, wind energy, paint, packaging, power generation and distribution, aerospace, rail, marine, and construction industries. With 4,000 employees across 60 chemical manufacturing facilities worldwide, Hexion is committed to creating better products and systems to improve the quality of life for people around the world.

This commitment parallels the company's forthright concern for keeping its employees safe. At Hexion, production often requires a control-room environment that ensures equipment is functioning to the letter and every stage of operations is precisely executed. Moreover, meticulous laboratory testing drives innovative solutions and product development that keeps Hexion at the head of its industry. An organizational setting with this level of dedication to precision naturally strives to achieve equal care in safety.

Unfortunately, safety at Hexion wasn't reaching the level of excellence leaders were targeting. Traditional EHS approaches failed to achieve desired results and even though each of the company's sites were focused on the standards and regulations

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required by law, safety was still not driving the culture. Hexion needed an approach that surpassed minimum standards and unified performance objectives and the organizational mindset across all of its 60 sites.

Solution

Hexion turned to DEKRA to achieve its goals and take its safety system from good to great. Leaders examined past performance and identified gaps that could be closed to ensure better outcomes and safer execution. While it was obvious the company was committed to hitting standards like lock-out, tag-out and fall protection, and supporting basic enabling systems, the general mindset at the production level was overlooking critical safety concerns leaders most wanted addressed.

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Senior leadership raised the question: What can we do differently? In particular, Hexion was concerned with protecting workers from serious injury and even potential fatality. While safety at the company was always focused on shielding people from major injury, the potential for risk is rooted in how the culture views exposure. If the culture encourages behaviors that minimize or ignore exposure, it leaves people in a perpetual state of risk, even if no one is harmed. Eventually luck runs out, and the unchecked exposure leads to an event that could have been avoided had steps been taken beforehand. Hexion understood this and demanded a cultural change—one that fostered a cohesive effort to shape the way people viewed exposure and how leaders supported safer decisions at the front lines.

The company incorporated serious injury and fatality exposure data into their dashboard of metrics and began reorienting the workforce to focus on exposures with the potential for serious injury. Employee buy-in was critical to success, and, while the workforce was hungry for the change, Hexion management understood that it was up to leadership to set the tone and drive the process forward. Site leaders were introduced to safety principles and practices and educated on the ways they could champion a new era of employee protection in the company. The key was to “get people awake to a philosophy of safety that wasn’t present before,” said Karen Koster, Hexion’s EHS executive vice president.

Leadership development and education began the process of waking up the workforce to the new safety mindset. Leaders took ownership of safety and showed their commitment by modeling safe behavior on the shop floor. They encouraged people to look for exposures and speak up when it changed. They were visible in their efforts to build a stronger culture, and their business, production, and performance management decisions reflected the organization’s priority for safety.

At a glance:

- Hexion is a leading global producer of epoxy specialty resins, modifiers, and curing agents serving a variety of companies across industries.
- Safety performance was good, but Hexion needed an approach that surpassed minimum standards and unified performance and culture across all of its 60 sites.
- Leaders implemented a serious injury and fatality process that focused on developing a cultural mindset that targeted exposure to severe injury.
- Serious incidents at Hexion are down 60% from pre-implementation measurements, with only a few minor incidents in the past year.

Results

Thanks to the commitment of Hexion leaders, the organization began to live the philosophy of safety that hadn’t been there before, creating a transformational change in performance and outcomes, as well as in the company culture itself.

Severe incidents at Hexion are down 60% from pre-implementation measurements. People are now aware of serious injury and fatality exposure and able to communicate openly and effectively to address it. Injuries in general are also in decline, with only a few minor incidents in the past year. Hexion’s success is putting the company on pace to reach its goal of zero severe injuries by 2020.

What’s the secret to Hexion’s success?

“You have to care,” says Koster. “Caring about people and finding a connection to human beings. Paying attention to the details and how people are motivated. Everybody wants the same thing. They want to raise their families. They want a good, challenging work environment where they are rewarded and valued. And they want to go home to their families. Good safety leaders understand that. And they are reaching out and connecting to people. They are adapting their leadership style to really make those connections.”