



How One Business Unit in a Global Food Processing Giant Cut Serious Injuries in Half With the Help of DEKRA's SafeAlign® System

What happens when one of the largest meat processing companies in the world realizes it has a systemic safety issue? And what if these safety issues take place at production locations with high turnover, multiple languages, diverse cultural backgrounds, and high intensity work environments? At that scale, is change even possible?

Yes, and DEKRA helped the company prove it. For five years, DEKRA experts worked with the industrial food company to reshape its culture and achieve two goals:

- A 15 percent year-over-year reduction in its recordable incident rate.
- Eliminating the most serious accidents, those resulting in life-altering or life-ending outcomes.

Business Unit Improvements:

Serious injuries reduced by over 45 percent.

Three consecutive years of at least a 15 percent reduction in the OSHA recordable rate.

Achieved 70 percent reduction in employee turnover compared to competitors.

Reduced the workers' compensation reserve to the lowest level in seven years.

DEKRA Assesses the Cause of Exposure

The first step of the process was a comprehensive assessment of the factors impacting the organization's ability to improve.

The path to positive change was a challenge: The majority of the work is intensely physical and repetitive, taking place in cold, wet conditions. Employee turnover was high, in some cases over 75 percent each year. Work hours were long and unpredictable, and challenging production targets focused on keeping the line speeds high. No less than 35 languages were spoken at the facilities.

On top of this, there was ongoing frustration about safety programs that were not having the desired outcomes. Safety programs came and went quickly, because they were dismissed if they did not show immediate results. All of these factors made sustainable improvement difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

At the onset of the project, safety results were seen as the responsibility of the safety department. This was one of the first issues addressed: Executive and site leadership had to embrace their safety responsibility.

SafeAlign® System Focusing on Building Safety Leadership Skills

Part of what the DEKRA assessment team noticed right away was a disconnect between corporate leadership and frontline employees.

DEKRA knows that reducing workplace injuries requires strengthening the skills of all levels of leadership, from managers to frontline leaders. Organizations that invest in safety leadership development experience fewer injuries, a more engaged workforce, lower turnover, and higher levels of performance.

DEKRA's solution is the SafeAlign® system, which gives leaders the confidence to conduct high-quality safety activities and leverage best practices that engage workers. These safety activities systematically identify and reduce exposure, thereby reducing injuries and illnesses. The core methodology of the SafeAlign® system involves four steps:

1. **Laying the Foundation.** Once a better understanding of the organization's past efforts is established, it becomes easier to recognize the foundational elements that carry the highest probability of success. Critical in this step is the governance process, with operational leadership

owning the change effort, setting the objectives, developing the rollout methodology and schedule, establishing safety activity targets, and implementing a communication plan.

2. **Developing Skills.** This step uses a multi-platform learning approach to enhance the effectiveness of specific safety activities and leadership best practices. It includes knowledge and skill-building workshops, reinforced through in-field coaching and technology-based prompts of key concepts. Every manager and frontline leader participates in this development activity.
3. **Tracking Levels of Engagement and Effectiveness.** A critical element of success is tracking leader engagement, exposure control, and exposure reduction. Tracking ensures that leaders at all levels are using their newly acquired skills and fulfilling their commitment to the process. The leaders also track and take action on the exposures identified through the various safety activities.
4. **Building Sustainability.** Almost all organizations struggle with sustaining leadership development efforts. The SafeAlign® system tackles the integration of new leaders and assures they continue to use the newly acquired skills.

To show leadership how the SafeAlign® system worked, and to customize the system for the industry and situation, pilot locations were selected and the change effort began in earnest. The system focused on high-quality safety activities like safety contacts, pre-shift job briefings, and hazard inspections. More importantly, it focused on how to use leadership best practices and a transformational leadership style to improve interactions with the workforce.

The development program included a classroom element and an in-field mentoring effort. A DEKRA consultant conducted the initial rounds of in-field mentoring. A critical component is the transfer of this mentoring responsibility to the organization's leaders for sustainability. DEKRA consultants stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the frontline leaders and managers on the processing floor to mentor them on the safety activity and leadership skills.

Governance was critical. The governance process extended from the executive level through to the site-level safety councils. DEKRA aided the company with the structure of the governance system, charters, agendas, and meeting management. Strategic direction was set at the executive level, and implementation planning and execution was managed at the business unit and site level.

Big Changes, From New Forklifts to Slower Chain Speeds

The SafeAlign® system created positive change for the company's culture. By working with the executive team to create governance around safety, DEKRA consultants were able to help leadership understand how their actions and decisions directly impacted exposure on the plant floor.

This critical change helped leadership think about safety as they would any other part of their business strategy. All it required was a process and consistent effort at all levels of the company.

The big shift created tangible change immediately. For example, after it was discovered that the current forklift models were tip-over hazards, the governance team decided to upgrade the company's fleet. In the past, an issue like this might languish for years. Some plants might make the change to the new forklift, while others might elect to stay with a cheaper model. In time, it might reach someone at a high enough level who had the wherewithal to ask the right questions about forklift incidents.

Another example involved line speed. During the implementation, DEKRA consultants noted that the line speed remained constant even if the site was short of staff. If the production quotas were not being met, the line speed might suddenly increase. The speed was increased without understanding why quotas were not being met. Speeding up the line increased exposure significantly as harried workers tried to keep up.

Once the governance team was made aware of the exposure, it made the decision to slow down the chain speed and adjust

based on staffing level in order to reduce injuries. For an organization not known for change in its process, the decision was historic. The resulting increase in production surprised and impressed leaders.

Slashing Serious Injuries by Almost Half

Since starting its work with DEKRA, the business unit delivered safety improvements, including:

- Reducing serious injuries by over 45 percent.
- Reducing injuries and illnesses 15 percent every year for the last three years.
- Reducing the employee turnover rate to about 70 percent less than competitors.
- Reducing the amount of money reserved to anticipate workplace injuries to its lowest level in seven years.

The success is the result of a wholesale change to systems and culture. The SafeAlign™ System also established a healthy communication structure that made changes sustainable. By building internal expertise around safety through fieldwork observations, workshops, mentoring, and more, DEKRA ensured good governance at all levels of the company.

Leadership learned the difference between good process and good execution. In addition to creating a better culture for workers, the improvements naturally put the company at a competitive advantage. Workers saw that leadership made decisions with their best interests in mind.

Creating a bottom line that benefits everyone is unique. For this company, it became reality.