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Time for Spring Clean-Up

By Mark Lillemon, CSP, Van Gilder Insurance Corp.

So many of us are reminded and motivated in the spring to clean out the unwanted and unneeded and refresh our environment akin to Mother Nature's amazing transformation. It's a time of renewal and rejuvenation and an opportunity to start fresh again. Your safety management process, procedures and policies should be included in that spring clean-up effort.

Most companies in today's twenty-first century business climate have developed formal written safety plans, manuals and related forms used to document their safety activities. It's not uncommon, however, to find program materials that are three to five years old or even older. Consider all the changes that occurred in your organization during that time period. What about work practice modifications and regulatory updates that may influence your policies? I'll give you a few examples. Referenced contact names and numbers for company personnel are often inaccurate because of position changes and layoffs. The contact names and telephone numbers in your crisis management plan may have changed. Supplier, vendor and professional services information can be outdated and inaccurate. For construction companies, safe work practices involving the use of mobile and tower cranes, including rigging and signaling, may not address OSHA's new crane standards that were effective in November 2010. These are the easier and more transparent program deficiencies that can be identified in your spring clean-up. I challenge companies to consider deep cleaning their programs.

Many organizations are diligent about periodic maintenance and updates to their existing plans on an on-going basis. However, when was the last thorough program diagnostic performed? If you were to conduct a comprehensive audit of your operations, would the practices and procedures implemented by your department employees, branch employees or field operations employees match your formal plan and protocol? When was the last time you obtained input from your employees using a perception survey or

similar tool? Do your procedures hinder or assist them in safely performing their work and conducting hazard assessments? Does your program include elements that promote and measure proactive safety activities that have a positive impact on your overall performance? Does your plan include a means to measure supervisor accountability? Are your policies simply a re-write of OSHA standards or do they provide clear operating instructions and processes? What does your safety training program look like? What topics are covered and how often are they held? Are they current and do you know if your workers understand the information? Has your executive team's philosophy and emphasis on safety and environmental management changed in the past couple of years, rendering your existing plan obsolete and ineffective? This is the deep cleaning I am referring to.

There is one other intangible benefit to this spring clean-up. Most industries have suffered during these economic times and most companies have experienced layoffs and are operating with lean staffing. However, the business environment is changing as we look at the second half of 2011 and onto 2012. We know that companies will start to hire again and experience operational growth. This is a great time and opportunity to refresh and renew your environmental, health and safety (EHS) management processes so the new hires experience a rich culture of responsible and effective program elements. These EHS program updates will also help to moderate and stabilize the effects of business expansion in the coming year. Remember, spring clean-up is an annual affair.

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