

## **Culture of Safety: A Window on Your Workplace**



# White Paper

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## Introduction

Paul O'Neill served as the CEO and Chairman of Alcoa, the huge aluminum multinational, from 1987 to 1999. O'Neill was an exceptional leader. He clearly understood the connection between a Culture of Safety and overall organizational excellence. He once told analysts: "If you want to know if Alcoa is moving forward, check our safety record. Safety is a leading indicator of financial performance. These things are all connected, safety performance, quality performance, maintenance performance."

Alcoa's revenues during O'Neill's tenure grew from \$1.5 billion in 1987 to \$23 billion in 2000.

O'Neill used safety as a window on Alcoa's overall performance, and invited everyone to take a look. But a company's "safety record" in terms of numbers of injuries and fatalities per hours worked, is only one way to diagnose your Culture of Safety -- and use it as a window, a reflection if you will, on your enterprise's multi-dimensional performance.

The many "markers" or characteristics of your Culture of Safety can be used to diagnose not only the level of your safety performance, but your organization's values. Housekeeping is probably the most expedient diagnostic tool. It is the most visible sign or marker of your Culture of Safety; the first impression most visitors, clients, and compliance inspectors will get of your operation.

For example, at one leading French cosmetics manufacturer facility, what you first notice at its 270,000-square-foot USA operation are scrubbed, gleaming white pebbled synthetic floors. Low-slung drop ceilings shower more light than in many offices. The facility is very clean, very bright, and organized.

In many parts of the plant, you can hear conversations from across the room. The loudest sound is clattering glass jars bumping along curving silver-metallic assembly lines. 82 decibels is as loud as it gets, according the site's industrial hygienist.

Workers look like medical assistants in white smocks and hairnets. The plant employs about 400 workers, and runs three shifts. Still, there is scant evidence of wear and tear in the nearly 20-year-old facility.

What you do see are other safety markers or indicators of commitment. Safety visuals, banners, and bulletin boards appear at every turn. "Safety and drugs don't mix." "Don't let safety slip away." Signs for first aid kits, blankets, eyewash stations, the right-to-know information station, and AEDs dot the shop floor. Blue screen video monitors suspended from the ceilings flash safety reminders: "Be careful when walking. Never assume forklift operators can see you." A large wall chart tracks each department's number of reported accidents, lost-time accidents, and days without a lost-time accident for the month.

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Why does this multi-billion-dollar multinational cosmetics powerhouse with 50,000+ employees in 140 countries, pay such close attention to detail that plant visitors are instructed that no high heel or open-toe shoes are allowed in any production area or warehouse?

## **Sending messages**

The multinational makes shrewd use of its Culture of Safety to send a variety of corporate messages to far-flung audiences broader than, but certainly including employees and site visitors.

To employees, the company uses safety to reinforce teamwork, problem-solving, participation and operational discipline.

To supervisors and managers, the message is: "If you can't manage safety, we don't believe you can manage quality or productivity or anything else," says one of the company's executives. "Safety cannot be pulled out and separated from these other business skills and goals."

To customers, the company's cosmetics are based on values such as wellness, health promotion, and "selling a dream," according to one executive. Products based on values require a values-based corporate culture. A strong commitment to safety and health reinforces the culture.

Safety also builds brand trust and loyalty. This cosmetics company's business model is based on innovation, quality, efficiency and image.

## **The wrong signal**

The lack of a Culture of Safety sends a damaging message that is the very opposite of the example we give here. The U.S. Chemical Safety Board reached this diagnosis after its investigation of the February 7, 2008, explosion at the Imperial Sugar refinery in Port Wentworth, Georgia that fatally injured 14 workers and injured 36 others, many with bad burns: inadequate housekeeping practices allowed highly combustible sugar dust and granulated sugar to build up throughout the refinery's packing buildings.

Workers testified that spilled sugar was knee-deep in places on the floor, and sugar dust had coated equipment and other elevated surfaces.

Here are research examples that show the positive diagnostics achieved by a Culture of Safety, as specifically applied to the housekeeping component:

- 69 percent of organizations with safety performance better than their peers also had neat, clean and well-organized workplaces, according to a Dawson Associates/Rochester

Business Alliance (DA/RBA) survey of 126 North American organizations across all business sectors. Only 31 percent of those with safety performance poorer than their peers reported neat and clean workplaces.

- Respondents were asked if their organization was financially healthy. Of those who responded “yes,” 62 percent also reported their workplace was neat, clean and well-organized. Those who reported being financially unhealthy had a neat score of only 27 percent..

## Non-verbal markers

Employees, customers, business partners, contractors and many others diagnose – making snap judgments about your organization’s Culture of Safety -- by several specific nonverbal “markers.”

Housekeeping is the most overwhelmingly visible safety marker. Whatever the reasons, a messy shop with rags strewn about, tools here and there, oil on the floor, and dust everywhere sends a powerful negative message about the company’s commitment to safe work – and also to discipline, organization and accountability.

Your employees and any number of “outsiders” quickly size up the “activators” of your Culture of Safety. What activates thinking about safety and safe behaviors? Are there meaningful signs, reminders, and prompts for safe behavior visible in the workplace? Perhaps there are video flat screens suspended from ceilings continually broadcasting safety messages, such as at the cosmetics plant we highlight here?

Is personal protective equipment worn wherever mandated? Without safety professionals watching? Is it well maintained? Is PPE sorted properly in storage, systematically cleaned when necessary, and standardized? Are PPE dispensers and vending machines, if used, easily within reach of employees?

Think about these markers. How does your organization present itself to a visitor (and to employees who work there every day)? Would a visitor (client, customer, prospect, potential new hire, compliance inspector) come away with a strong impression that safety really is a core value and a

## Take control of clutter

Ready to clip clutter and be a good housekeeping champion? Here’s what you do:

- Make it a corporate imperative. If your CEO realizes that good housekeeping cuts costs, increases production, allows faster operations, reduces incidents and fire hazards and improves morale, setting the tone to clean up should be easy.
- Make clutter control a performance measure. Since it’s an overriding issue, bad grades in housekeeping must trump whatever good gets done.
- Realize that it’s not a problem of organization -- it’s a problem of excess. You need more dumpsters and recycling bins and the will to use them, not more racks and storerooms. If you don’t need it now, dump it! Don’t store it.
- Be sure that everything has a place and is kept in that place when not in active use. For example, have tool outlines on tool boards by machines to show what’s missing.
- Minimize work in process. If the job is done, move it out.
- Reinforce your clutter-clipping champions. Reward them. Praise them. Ask them to do workshops on clutter control. Have new employees spend a day with them.

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shared commitment in your enterprise? Would he or she see and feel a strong Culture of Safety in your workplace?

## **A 20-minute diagnosis**

Firefighters arrive at a burning building and immediately know what to do. They look at the fire and make a judgment from their gut. Safety professionals will tell you that with sufficient years of experience, they can diagnose any company's Culture of Safety within the first 20 minutes of walking through the front door.

Here are nine "markers" that help diagnose a Culture of Safety:

- 1)** A safety accountability program should be in place that establishes goals; assigns responsibility for attaining those goals; measures progress toward achieving goals; and rewards or penalizes individuals accountable for established goals. A management accountability plan should include, at a minimum, allocating losses back to the originating business unit.
- 2)** A risk management program defines the safety program elements and activities of the location. A written policy is distributed to supervisors and presented to new employees, reviewed annually, posted and generally distributed.
- 3)** A comprehensive safety orientation and regular safety training program is in place and functioning well. Training is based on an outline of objectives for specialized operations with periodic retraining. Job training includes safe job procedures, practice in skills and verification of learning. The program should undergo an annual review to update training needs.
- 4)** A good Culture of Safety should have an accident investigation team that does not focus on blaming the employees. This includes a strong root cause analysis process that points failures back to the company's management decision-making system, if that is indeed the cause. The accident investigation system is fully documented, and corrective actions are reviewed by middle and top managers and followed up to completion.
- 5)** How a company manages employee injuries is a key indicator of its Culture of Safety. Injuries and illnesses should be reported immediately. Quick and appropriate medical treatment -- at a nearby clinic or an on-site pre-hospital care facility attended by EMTs or nurses -- should be provided. The company should work with employees to get them back on the job as soon as possible.
- 6)** Proper employee selection and placement are vital if employees are to perform efficiently, without injuring themselves or posing a danger to others. Are potential employees asked specific

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questions regarding their commitment to safety? Screening should include job-related tests, past safety performance, work history, drug screen and background checks, including Motor Vehicle Reports (MVRs).

**7)** The company with a solid Culture of Safety has all the standard exposure and hazard control programs in place. Examine the table of contents of the safety manual -- then talk to employees in the field to see if they can confirm such activities.

**8)** Take a cursory walk around the facility and examine general housekeeping and maintenance of the building and grounds. Preventative maintenance schedules and other routine maintenance activities are good indicators of safety practices.

**9)** Financial strength. This can easily be an indicator of a company's Culture of Safety. Many customers require specific minimum safety performance measures before work will be allotted to vendors. If you hear comments like, "We cannot afford not to be safe," these are positive comments. But if you hear, "We can't afford to do that," especially for relatively inexpensive recommendations, beware that a Culture of Safety is lacking.

## **Misreading culture**

Beware of two mistakes that are often made when diagnosing a Culture of Safety. The first: putting too much emphasis on injury records.

In a study by the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, the authors cited a gross underestimation of safety performance data. The data was collected from four workers' compensation, occupational disease statistic and OSHA survey databases in the state of Michigan between the years 1999 and 2001.

Comparing data collected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the four Michigan databases using capture-recapture analysis, the authors determined that 67 percent of injuries and 69 percent of illnesses went unreported in the state over the three-year time period.

The report identified worker intimidation as well as a number of disincentives that may discourage workers and employers from reporting work-related injuries and illnesses. The report also noted widespread reports from occupational health practitioners who were pressured not to record an injury or illness.

Injury rates are so-called lagging indicators, after-the-fact outcomes that provide no detail on how or why the accident occurred. They do not provide a realistic interpretation of the level of safety performance in a company. More importantly, they have no predictive ability or value.

The second diagnostic error: Isolating your safety compliance program in a silo all its own, far

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from the mainstream of your business. Safety performance occurs in a context, and that context is your organization. There is a scientifically valid association between safety performance and what the organization values. If you treat safety in isolation, as if it has nothing to do with the rest of the organization, you only address the symptoms, not the causes, of the injuries.

Assess and eliminate when needed these variables (and others that you can brainstorm) that might be causing injuries and negatively affecting your Culture of Safety:

- Organizational culture
- Production pressures
- Ineffective communication
- Psychological stress: Work-related, financial, marital, etc.
- Mental and physical capability to perform task(s)
- Injury and accident investigations: Are root cause analyses conducted? (There should be no pressure to find a single cause. Often experts find 10-20 causes throughout processes at different levels of an organization, and go about correcting them in priority order.)
- Job complexity
- Adequacy of training
- Fatigue
- Maintenance errors
- The environment: Temperature, air quality, humidity, etc.
- Overtime

Bottom line: Good safety practices and dangerous ones are visible at any worksite and show up on government agency records, inspections, workers' comp rates, internal audits, or if there is an accident or chemical spill, in the media. Experts can walk in a shop door and know how much the company values safety in a matter of minutes, primarily by using housekeeping as a key indicator. Make use of a Culture of Safety to create positive impressions of your company in the marketplace, support trust in your brands, and as Paul O'Neill showed at Alcoa, to grow revenues.

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## About Honeywell Safety Products

Honeywell Safety Products helps build an enduring culture of safety through comprehensive education; innovative technologies; and comfortable, high-performance products that inspire workers to make safer choices on their own. The company is the ideal partner for organizations committed to a cultural transformation that minimizes injuries and maintains a safer, more productive workplace.

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