



Strong Safety Programs Protect Bottom Line

Travis Rhoden

J. J. Keller Editor — Workplace Safety

When companies are under pressure to minimize costs, safety is often one of the first areas where cuts are made. But safety is even more critical during business downturns. In fact, experts say maintaining a solid safety process at all times is essential to protecting the company's long-term bottom line. **Below are 3 strong reasons to continue investing in safety even when your budget is tight.**

1: Changing employee responsibilities and increased anxiety.

Workforce cutbacks mean employees are carrying additional workloads, working longer hours, and performing unfamiliar tasks — all of which can increase the risk of accidents and injuries.

Furthermore, employee morale is down and stress levels are up. Employees can easily become distracted by concerns about the economy and safety awareness is no longer top of mind. Another possible side effect is that employees who feel anxious about keeping their jobs may not report unsafe conditions.

2: A slowdown in operations can lead to increased safety training opportunities.

A slower production schedule makes it easier to fit in workplace safety training without sacrificing productivity. And, employees may be more interested in safety training, in the hopes that it will make them more valuable to your company.

Another side effect of economic downturns is that companies often rely on less experienced employees or temporary employees. These employees may have little or no previous safety training, and are not familiar with the company's specific operations.

Regardless of the makeup of your workforce, OSHA requires training in many areas, and that fact doesn't change based on economic conditions. Which leads us to the next reason ...

3: OSHA enforcement is heating up.

Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis said in a recent speech that "the Labor Department is back in the enforcement business."

For fiscal year 2009, OSHA's budget was raised by \$27 million over the previous year. In addition, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act included \$13.6 million to support OSHA's federal and state enforcement activity and improved construction targeting.

President Obama's fiscal year 2010 budget request builds on the renewed commitment to OSHA enforcement. It proposes an increase of \$50.6 million for the agency, allowing them to hire more than 200 new employees — including 160 more inspectors, 25 more discrimination investigators to pursue whistleblower complaints, and 20 more staff members who will help develop workplace standards for safety and health.

OSHA Enforcement By The Numbers

\$50.6 million increase in 2010 budget request

200 new employees total

160 new inspectors

“ Just because operations are slower, it doesn't mean hazards have gone away or been reduced. Safety is needed just as much and will impact the bottom-line just as much. In fact, many companies are stretching resources by putting workers in unfamiliar jobs which actually increases risk. ”