

## Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

#120– 1/17/13

A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

### TOPIC: SAFETY/LOSS PREVENTION

I am a bit uncertain how to approach this series of topics, and have concerns about their reception. So far we have mostly discussed claims and litigation issues –the consequences of injuries and damages, or controlling expense after something bad has happened. Safety, or loss prevention, is a much cheaper process. Directed at reducing the frequency and severity of injuries and damage, significant cost savings, direct and indirect, can be achieved.

Generalizing, the problem is that, with some notable exceptions, YCPARMIA members have not been very good at it. We often talk the talk, but our collective action is inconsistent. Private industry, with their profit motive, generally has a zero tolerance for third party and employee claims; claims costs are recognized as an expense that adversely affects the bottom line. Management's accountability and responsibility for safety is a focus, and is part of the culture with broad, well publicized accountability.

California public entities do not have the profit motive; historically they could probably provide their services with less consideration for the bottom line. Claims by third parties, and injured workers were possibly seen as an unavoidable cost of doing the public's business. As long as the services were being delivered, and the budget balanced, the entity's risk expense was generally acceptable. With little motivation to do better, safety was the thing that you got to when everything else was done; it was often delegated down the ladder with uneven results.

Today California public entities still do not have a profit motive, but their budgets have tightened. Absorbing the repeated hits of injury and damage claims has become more difficult, and with smaller staffs and tighter budgets they can have an adverse impact on delivering services. It would therefore seem that this is an opportune time to enhance the public entity safety culture; in many cases there is low hanging fruit that can be picked with minimum cost or effort.

To gain perspective we might look at the most basic safety program by asking a compound question: Does your entity-wide safety committee meet monthly, submit a written report with recommendations to the head of your agency, and is there ongoing communication back, or action based on those issues/recommendations? The general answer when YCPARMIA has asked this question is that people are too busy to meet monthly, and that there is little or no interaction. Everyone is too busy doing their regular jobs. There is often an undefined responsibility for safety without much accountability.

The results are predictable. Over the last 30 years YCPARMIA members have averaged 426 workers' compensation injuries a year; in the last three years we have averaged 424. The same safety effort is obtaining the same results; at some point it needs to be recognized that a more consistent and structured approach is needed, especially in the face of inflationary trends in benefit/damage costs.

Next topic: OSHA