

Creating a safety culture in your Fire Department



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At the recent International Association of Fire Chiefs conference, a discussion arose about developing safety cultures in organizations (volunteer, combination, or career). The discussions quickly transformed into an "I do it this way, I do it that way" discussion, however, the chiefs had one factor in common: safety being THE most important. They agreed, it starts with the mission statement and follows through every probationary, introductory, training, performance and disciplinary activity that an individual is involved within their respective organization.

Safety culture is a term used to describe the way in which safety is managed in the workplace and often reflects "the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and values that employees share in relation to safety" (Cox and Cox, 1991). Another, and possibly more practical, definition is that safety culture is how the organization is functioning when no one is watching. This concept uses the same philosophy that successful industrial safety programs have used for decades. Engraining safety into the job and workplace from the start of a training program is paramount to building a safety culture in an organization.

While, not one universal approach will work for every department, it is still important to effectively implement safety tools and techniques that each organization feels will work best to achieve success.

Here are 10 quick steps that are recommended to have in place:

- The chief openly supports safety and practices positive safety activities
- The mission statement includes doing the job "safely"
- The probationary program stresses "the safe way to do the job"
- SOGs have an underlying safety consideration
- Training emphasizes the safe way to do the job
- An active Health and Safety Officer is in the organization
- Officers preach and practice safety
- A progressive disciplinary practice is implemented when safety violations occur
- After accidents, investigations are conducted and training occurs to prevent reoccurrence
- Accidents and near misses are reviewed periodically and actions are taken to prevent reoccurrence.

These 10 steps may help to successfully build a safety culture into any organization.

There is a reality to continually look at vulnerabilities, determine precautions necessary to protect assets and make sound decisions with the safety of personnel being paramount in those decisions.

The Vulnerability Assessment Program, currently under development by the USFA, NFFF, FACETS and sponsored by Honeywell will take this industry forward in dramatic fashion to protect emergency service organizations. 