from Jim Howard, NHLA President . . .

A “Healthy” Industry

Let’s face it: We work in a dangerous business. From driving a forklift to pulling items off the green chain to nearly every task in a sawmill, there is the constant potential for accidents. Some of these can be serious or even life-threatening. Fortunately, work related accidents, especially worst case scenarios, are relatively rare. By and large, our companies are safe and rewarding places to work.

No matter how good our company’s safety record is, we can always do better. Even a single accident is one too many, especially to the injured person and his or her family. Implementing a safety program isn’t just a way of “being nice.” It’s good business. Companies that have implemented effective safety programs have seen not only a reduction in the number and severity of accidents, but improvements in their bottom lines – less down-time for employees and equipment, and lower worker’s compensation premiums, as well as less income reduction for employees.

That’s why NHLA launched its own Safety Committee last year, to come up with “best practices” in our industry and to share them with you. NHLA is committed to a healthy hardwood lumber industry – healthy forests, healthy people and healthy businesses.

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The Need for a Safety Program

by Jim Shephard

In many years we all have seen the industrial pressure cooker apply forces in places that we never expected – insurance rates, cost of raw materials, equipment and fuel cost, energy cost, etc. All of this is taking a large bite out of company profits. Then add to this list employee benefits, salaries, training, vacation, and sick days. When does it stop?

The situations we encounter as a consulting firm are almost the same; it’s just different people dealing with the same kind of pressure at different places. We are just lucky – or unlucky – enough to be present when some of the stuff hits the fan, or we are called to aid a client after the fact.

A TRUE STORY

Just last week, walking from one plane to another to the Atlanta airport, I received a call from a client that had lost an employee in a terrible accident involving a piece of heavy equipment.

What are you doing to protect yourself from a similar nightmare?

One can only guess what this gentleman is going through right now. After dealing with the loss, he must then try to console the family. Remember, he must continue working with his employees who have lost a friend or colleague. On top of this, he must work with OSHA.

You may think you know the anxiety he and others at his firm are enduring right now, asking themselves questions such as was the employee properly trained? What was he doing at the time of the accident? Somewhere in the midst of all this the question becomes “What can we do to prevent this terrible thing from happening again?”

Maybe it is time to ask yourself a few very difficult questions. Where are we with our safety programs? Do our programs deal with real-world issues here at our facility? Are we providing the proper tools for our employees to help them complete their tasks in a safe manner?

Another Example

Let me share another tragedy. A young man was hired into what he thought was a well paying position. The employment ad in the paper stated “No experience necessary.” One would assume, “Hey they will train me.” The young gentleman received his indoctrination training session and immediately he was put to work with an “experienced employee.”

After a couple of hours, he was left alone to continue his work. His training was over. Now he was well on his way to disaster. The so-called “experienced employee” had only been on the job three weeks before.

Not being told he had to wear safety glasses, the new hire was cutting banding with a pair of tin snips. (Yes, the wrong tool for the job.) Within a matter of hours, he had lost his right eye.

Jim L. Shephard spoke at the 2006 NHLA Annual Convention.

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from Mark Barford, CAE, Executive Director . . .

Sharing Ideas

One of the many hats I wear here at NHLA is that of liaison with the Safety Committee. Along with Nancy Arend who chairs the committee, most if not all of the members were chosen because the companies they represent already have implemented successful safety programs. When it comes to safety, they represent the industry’s “best practices.”

The idea is simple. We want to learn what works in “the real world,” then share it with you. By being a member of NHLA, you’re not alone. There’s no point in anyone having to “invent the wheel” over and over again.

The Safety Committee is in the process of forming a strategic partnership with OSHA, the federal government’s Occupational Safety Health Administration. OSHA can help them to identify safety standards for the hardwood lumber industry as well as the most common lapses in safety. Once that is collected, the information will be shared with you in binders or a website or both a little at a time.

Mark Barford, CAE, Executive Director
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ASK YOURSELF

Are your employee training programs real world? Are the site and task specific? How do you evaluate your employees to ensure they have retained the information?

On the other hand, after a training session can you see any positive results in your work force concerning equipment operation, reductions in equipment maintenance, or product damage?

Jim L. Shephard