



Cuff'em please! Safe workplaces

March 11, 2013 - Design / Build

Long ago, responsibility for safety seemed to go hand-in-hand with security - not truly a separate specialty. Post the game-changing influence of OSHA and the increase in international manufacturing and processing, safety has taken on its own aura.

I still expect that security personnel will ensure and log that building services has foul-weather matting down in the lobby when it's wet outside. I see fire safety, security and building maintenance personnel all involved in checking fire stairwells, fire doors and exit areas. But when it comes to pharma plants, chemicals, food processing equipment and distribution and conveyor set-ups, there are safety issues that benefit from a unique perspective.

Years ago, the HR director at a large processing facility, lamented about his lack of influence getting through to workers about safety procedures. He ordered chemically-resistant extra-long gloves so that any caustic solutions that dripped would get caught in the gloves' cuff-folds. He spoke with the workers, imploring them to follow proper procedures. Most of the time, his directions were ignored. The workers appreciated the extra long gloves since they covered more of their sleeves. The HR guy couldn't spend all day in the processing areas and still get his work done. The workers occasionally suffered chemical burns that could have been prevented. Once a safety manager was brought on staff, a poster went up. It said: "Cuff'em: the arm you save may be your own!" One photo showed a properly-cuffed glove. The other showed a photo of a forearm with severe chemical burns. I don't think they've ever had that type of worker injury again.

Recently, in a large warehouse that moves millions of gallons of bottled product a year, and where there'd never been a forklift accident, the night warehouse manager was promoted to the day shift. He got the new assignment when the day fellow retired. Accidents skyrocketed. Security, HR and risk managers all coordinated to figure out what was going wrong -was it sabotage? Apparently, the complexity of day operations and warehouse traffic patterns overwhelmed the new man. It wasn't just more of the same work he'd been used to for years. Forklift operators were more careless without strict supervision and nothing good was coming from the promotion. A new safety manager was brought in and given oversight. There haven't been any accidents since his arrival.

Is it more expensive to have the extra personnel? Sure, but it's far cheaper than paying all the costs involved in responding to incidents. Perhaps this is the one area where government intervention has actually saved lives and money over the long run.

From a building security perspective, the 360 Degree Awareness approach that we often see in fleet safety management is successfully "borrowed" when we change our fixed spaces. We create more complex systems to prevent intruders from gaining access to buildings. We design better locking systems so that internal doors, ones only secured to partitions and non-load bearing walls, actually can hold up against intentional break-ins. But now, with a greater safety perspective, we're also choosing materials that help us cut down on possible accidents with every upgrade to any areas in

our buildings. Consider that we are applying the "cuff-em" approach whenever we can!
Erica Harrison, CPP, is the president of AIMS Testing Co., Inc., Miller Place, N.Y.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540