

Focus on Safety: Integrated Safety Management

In 1998 the Department of Energy (DOE) mandated all contractors and subcontractors that perform work within the DOE complex to institute a formalized and structured philosophy known as integrated safety management systems (ISMS). ISMS is not just a philosophy, but also a process that is designed to ensure that safety and health (S&H) requirements are imbedded or integrated within a projects' operational steps, well before the actual work is performed. Prior to ISMS, incorporating S&H controls within an operational framework was a major headache. Frequently, a tug-of-war would ensue between S&H and operations. Therefore, it was considered common practice to have S&H involvement occur during field activities, rather than during the initial conceptual design stages. The reasoning was that intercompany conflicts would be eliminated or, at least minimized. And so field operations were bound to progress in a smooth manner. Once field activities began, S&H would have the opportunity to incorporate the appropriate rules and regulations and thus, ensure that all tasks would be performed in a safe and healthful manner – Right?! Well, not quite. What typically resulted were unforeseen conflicts in the field, followed by work stoppage and other work delays as S&H infractions or potential hazards would be observed. The reason for these incidents was that S&H was not properly represented during the design stage as only the tasks relevant to the operational steps were addressed. An example of what can happen when S&H is not properly incorporated into work processes occurred during the World Trade Center tragedy in New York City on September 11, 2001. While ISMS was already established at DOE sites, the private sector was lagging behind in this area. So during this fateful event, while many companies brought their experts to assist with the rescue and recovery efforts – many of whom were indoctrinated with the ISMS concepts - their attempts to support the fire fighters and police were not fully appreciated. For example, a number of respirator protection experts that were assigned near Ground Zero were tasked to train rescuers on how to protect themselves from harmful airborne contaminants including asbestos fibers. The response from members of the NYPD and FDNY was less than favorable. Instead of heeding the warnings of the S&H professionals and to wear their respirators properly, comments along the lines of “Thanks for the information now let me do my job” resounded. This attitude needs to be understood and even appreciated as their main concern was with their co-workers who entered Ground Zero earlier as well as the many survivors that were in need of immediate help. Yet while their concern was genuine, they were adamant to perform work without the appropriate protective controls. Because the S&H professionals were brought to NYC strictly to assist the rescue/recovery efforts on a voluntary basis, little resistance was given. Today, we have heard about the many heart-felt stories of these heroes who have now been diagnosed with debilitating respiratory ailments due to their involvement with the 9/11 aftermath. Such is the case when S&H is not included up front during the

design stage. Granted, this a case where a design phase or initial strategy planning was limited due to the immediacy of this specific incident. But we can also see that with the appropriate planning, the illnesses that the 9-11 rescuers contracted could have been prevented. ISMS is a philosophy and process that is designed to ensure occupational injuries illnesses do not come to fruition. Below are the five core functions are ISMS.

1. Define the Scope of Work
2. Identify the hazards
3. Develop the appropriate Controls
4. Work within the Controls
5. Perform feedback analysis

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