

# TerranearPMC Safety Share

## Week of July 7, 2014 – Zero Accident Philosophy

Whenever I ask the question of whether achieving zero accidents is a realistic goal, there is a typical response where about half the room slightly shakes their heads ever so slightly over a veil of silence. I think everyone knows what the answer should be or what they are expected to say; but there seems to be a little skepticism. Maybe no one wants to be perceived as an agitator or dissenter. Very rarely when the topic of the attainability of zero accidents is brought up at either a tailgate meeting or a venue similar to an “All Hands” meeting, does anyone stand up and challenge this concept: one that states that ALL workplace accidents and injuries are preventable.

The philosophy of Zero Accidents means to achieve an accident free workplace; not only no fatalities or accidents causing days away from work or even restricted duty need to be achieved, but no accidents at all - period. This includes adverse health effects from exposures to hazardous substances as well as first aid injuries. After all, one may accidentally get a whiff of a chemical, resulting in either the displeasure of being subject to an objectionable odor, or develop a serious biological reaction. Or one may receive a minor scratch that could have very easily been a severe laceration or a crushed arm. It is only the positioning of equipment or personnel or the timing of the event that could have resulted in two very different outcomes.

Maybe we need to ask, “What is an accident?” OK...within the Occupational Safety and Health Field, an accident is defined as an undesirable event that results in harm to people, damage to property, or loss to a process. Meanwhile, an *incident* is described as an undesired event without any negative outcome; however, under slightly different circumstances, could result in harm to people, damage to property, or loss to a process. So even if an undesirable event occurs, such as a bucket from a front-end loader disconnecting (because it was not properly secured) and hits the ground without anyone getting hurt, we still need to understand what went wrong, rather than just expelling a loud sigh of relief while continuing work as if nothing happened...after all, no harm, no foul!...right?! Well, not exactly. If we decide to let a simple incident go unchecked, then whatever caused the mishap may very well happen again (as we did not take the time to correct the specific condition that needed to be adjusted); only the next time a person could be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It is imperative that when we notice something that needs to be corrected, as individuals, we need to take the initiative so that the proper steps are set in motion to correct what we noticed to be questionable. This does not mean that we need to get underneath an excavator with a socket wrench: we just need to inform a supervisor or someone else with authority what was witnessed. Too many times people tend to ignore things and “let it slide.” Maybe we feel a little uncomfortable to speak out. That’s understandable; however, as the saying goes, “safety is no accident.” The only way we can achieve a safe work environment with a zero accident philosophy is that we all need to be actively involved. We each need to ask ourselves, “if everyone on my project behaved exactly as I do, how safe would this work site be?”

How many of us have participated in an accident/incident investigation? This is something we all need to do at least once (more would be better). If we really are conscientious in performing an



## TerranearPMC Safety Share

investigation, we will see every time that the unwanted event, be it a serious injury or minor mishap, is preventable. Only through a concerted effort of investigating all the facts and placing events in their proper sequence, would we see where a glitch occurred. If we can identify a hazardous situation before an unwanted event occurs then we are taking a proactive approach to keep our workplace safe while providing a zero accident work ethic.

Implementation of a Zero-Accident Campaign requires three important pillars: the positive attitude of the top management; a connective approach of the safety and health process by line managers and supervisors; and the promotion of voluntary activities in the workplace. A Zero-Accident Campaign depends on the mutual relationships and assistance of these three pillars.

**The positive attitude of the top management:** The starting point of safety and health activity is a tough attitude held by top management towards zero accidents and zero diseases. The campaign starts with a determined commitment by the senior management to respect every single worker and ensure no injuries. A positive attitude change at the top alters everything. Top managers must take the initiative in changing their way of thinking regarding zero accidents.

**The safety and health system by line managers and supervisors:** In order to promote safety and health in the workplace, it is essential for line managers and supervisors to lead by example by integrating safety and health activities into day-to-day work, making safety and health part of the line management. Complete management of the safety and health system by line managers and supervisors is essential for any Zero-Accident Campaign to succeed.

**The activation of voluntary activities in the workplace:** Human error plays a part in most industrial accidents, and each and every worker needs to be fully aware that responsibility cannot be shifted to others. Workers must engage in small group activities for zero accidents with the awareness that their existence is irreplaceable for their families and dependants and safety and health is their own and their co-workers' responsibility.

A successful safety program will not happen unless everyone takes part in the practical activities with the positive attitude of "I will not get injured" and "My co-workers will never get injured."

Zero Accidents on the job? Is this a realistic and attainable goal? While reaching such a level of excellence may take a concerted effort by everyone, the experts in the field of accident prevention insist that such a goal is attainable. One thing is certain: if we do not strive for such an aspiring goal, we then will be setting ourselves and co-workers for something less than zero accidents. Then the questions we will need to ask are; what type accidents are OK, and how many accidents do we find acceptable and therefore, do we allow? The answers to all these questions should be NONE.

**The most difficult thing is the decision to act. The rest is merely  
tenacity**

Amelia Earhart