Severity and Frequency Meeting Kit

When evaluating hazards of a new job or task many professionals evaluate severity versus frequency (or likelihood of occurring). Using this method enables an individual to compare a less severe but more frequent outcome to a severe but less frequently occurring outcome to decide where to place the most time, energy, and resources in mitigating hazards to prevent incidents.

SEVERITY

Severity is defined as “the fact or condition of being severe”. Severe is then defined as “of something bad or undesirable; intense”. We are all familiar with terms such as severe storm or severe consequences, but severe can mean different things to different people. When evaluating outcomes of an incident occurring it is useful to use a scale from 1 to 10 or 1 to 100 and assign examples to the numbers to help define severity. For example, a person who is evaluating the negative outcomes created by a hazard of a new work task may feel that an incident that results in a recordable injury is a 7 on a 1 to 10 scale. A 10 on the scale may be a fatality or losing an entire building to a fire. This creates more of a solid definition of what is considered severe to the individual, group, or company evaluating the hazards and negative outcomes of a new work task.

FREQUENCY

Frequency is defined as “the rate at which something occurs or is repeated over a particular period of time or in a given sample”. The term frequent, just like severe, can also mean many different things to different people. The same method of assigning numbers to severity can be done for frequency to better define it. After defining frequency, you can look at both severity and frequency of negative outcomes resulting from the different hazards of a new work task or a possible negative event.

SEVERITY AND FREQUENCY EVALUATION

It is not enough to just focus on the hazards or events that have the most severe outcomes. If the frequency of the event causing the severe outcome is extremely low, then it may not be what needs the most attention. A hazard or event that occurs very frequently and causes a low severity incident may need more attention to protect employees.

FREQUENCY AND SEVERITY RATE INTERTWINED

Most statistical analyses of accidents are based on either frequency or severity or both. The standard frequency rate represents the number of disabling injuries for given man hours of exposure. The standard severity rate is the total time charged because of lost time injury for a given number of man hours of exposure.

Thus, the frequency rate indicates how many injuries are occurring in relation to number of man hours worked and the severity rate indicates how severe those injuries are in terms of wage lost in relation to hours of exposure.

Frequency and severity rate vary from one industry to another rate, whereas mining and lumbering are at the other opposite extremes. These differences reflect not only the inherent dangers in the industry but also many other factors including the efficiency of the safety program.

EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITY FOR WORKERS

A new concept was inherent in laws that the employer should accept primary responsibility for injuries incurred at work even though they could not be attributed to any one person or cause. Industry became legally liable for injuries to its workers and became obligated to provide benefits during the time lost from work, medical and surgical care, and death benefits to dependents.

BEST PRACTICES TO REDUCE INJURIES IN THE WORKPLACE FOR WORKERS

Safety culture

Establish a strong safety culture. Begin every meeting with a safety update.

Ensure from the moment of hire each employee understands that safety is his or her responsibility. Strengthen and consistently enforce policies and procedures to promote a safer workplace.

Train Workers

Provide continuous training and try to establish a return-on-investment (ROI) for all training initiatives.

Report

Strengthen internal accident reporting system. Ensure employees understand that injuries must be reported immediately, even if they do not feel the need to seek medical treatment at that time.

Physicians/ urgent care clinics

Develop a network of local physicians or urgent care clinics to treat your injured employees.

Job description

Make sure you have current, written descriptions for each job. Send a copy of this job description to the physician at the time of injury and each time the employee visits a new physician. Update physical requirements so that doctors understand what employees really do in their work process. Otherwise, doctors rely solely on the employee’s description of the physical requirements of the position, which may tend to overstate physical requirements.

Employee buy – in

Employee ownership of the safety process is critical to a safe

working environment. Form a safety committee composed of line employees and a few front-line supervisors, with your risk management department on board. Front-line employees are often best versed in determining how to prevent future accidents. They can make common-sense suggestions on how to prevent future losses.

FINAL WORD

Defining and looking at both severity and frequency helps to avoid only focusing on the less frequent “big” hazards that result in severe consequences such as a fatality. Attention also needs to be given to issues such as trip hazards that are much more frequent with a lesser outcome of severity. Often it is smaller more common hazards that lead to most workplace injuries, not the hazards that cause the most severe outcomes.