

INJURY PREVENTION

DISCIPLINE SHOULD BE PART OF YOUR SAFETY PROGRAM

DOES YOUR Injury and Illness Prevention Program spell out the disciplinary action your company will pursue if its safety rules are not adhered to?

Addressing disciplinary issues can be a very sensitive and stressful process for most managers, supervisors and employees. However, if disciplinary issues are avoided or handled poorly, it can lead to serious consequences such as property damage, injury or even fatality.

Looking at discipline not as a form of punishment but as a rule or system of rules governing conduct or activity in order to eliminate unsafe circumstances, might ease the stress for the owner, manager and employee.

Education is the key to establishing proper disciplinary procedures and holding employees accountable to the company's health and safety policy and program, as well as to applicable regulatory requirements.

The main objective of a disciplinary program is to ensure that rules and safe work practices are taken seriously by all employees, and that they are followed. When disciplinary action is deemed appropriate, it should be conducted in a timely manner. Trying to correct unsafe behavior by waiting only allows a habit to become more ingrained.

Discipline should be positive, not punitive or negative. The goal is to correct the problem, action or behavior. The type of discipline should fit the severity of the misconduct and be conducted in private.

If your company hires subcontractors, they should also be required to comply with your health and safety policy.

Sample disciplinary action

Make it clear that the company reserves the right to discipline employees who knowingly violate company safety rules or policies. Disciplinary measures should include, but not be limited to:

- Verbal warning (documented) for minor offenses.
- Written warning for more severe or repeated violations.
- Suspension, if verbal and written warnings do not prove to be sufficient.

If none of the above measures achieve satisfactory corrective results and no other acceptable solution can be found, the company will have no choice but to terminate employment for those who continue to jeopardize their own safety and the safety of others.

Non-punitive discipline

The first step of formal non-punitive discipline is to issue an "oral reminder," with the manager's primary goal being to gain the employee's agreement to solve the problem.

Should the problem continue, the manager moves to the second step – the "written reminder." Together, the manager and the employee create an action plan to eliminate the gap between actual and desired performance.

If disciplinary discussions have failed to produce the desired changes, management then places the individual on a paid, one-day "decision-making leave." Tenure with the organization is conditional on the individual's decision to solve the immediate problem and make a "total performance commitment" to good performance on the job.

The employee is instructed to return on the day following the leave with a decision either to change and stay, or quit and find more satisfying work elsewhere. Thus, the purpose of the disciplinary transaction has changed from a punishment method to a process that requires individuals to accept responsibility for their own behavior, performance and continued participation in the enterprise.



Five-step disciplinary program process

Action	Employees involved
Review policy and procedures	Managers and supervisors
Investigate accusations and infractions	Supervisors, safety & health reps
Determine and review disciplinary actions	Supervisors, safety & health reps
Document disciplinary actions and program enforcement	Supervisors, safety & health reps
Conduct disciplinary meetings and promote safe work practices and regulatory compliance	Supervisors, safety & health reps

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