

ENHANCING WORKPLACE SAFETY VIA SAFETY ORIENTATION, THE GATEWAY TO ACCIDENT PREVENTION AND INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

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Safety orientation is crucial for the oil & gas industry, manufacturing, construction and agricultural sectors. Proper safety orientation enhances production by reducing accident incidents in workplaces. Unfortunately, many organizations have not embraced this subject and given it the deserved attention. In this paper, the authors delve into the critical role of safety orientation in preventing workplace accidents and fostering increased productivity across various sectors. Through a comprehensive analysis of accident incidents, regulatory frameworks, and the consequences of poor orientation, this study emphasizes the urgent need for robust safety training programs. The paper explores the responsibilities of the government, regulatory bodies, corporations, and employees in ensuring a safe work environment. Moreover, it proposes practical recommendations to enhance safety orientation practices, creating a foundation for a culture of safety in workplaces.

Keywords: Safety, Orientation, Accident, Company, Workers, Government, Environment, Training.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Safety orientation is not just a legal obligation; it is a moral and ethical responsibility that employers owe to their employees. It is a known fact that incidence of lack of requisite knowledge could kill. The Holy Bible (KJ, 2000) attested to this in the Old Testament by saying: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." The pertinent knowledge here can be acquired through safety orientation/training for the workforce. By prioritizing comprehensive safety training, we not only protect lives but also

empower the workforce with the knowledge and confidence to navigate their professional endeavors safely.

What is this knowledge? It is what prepares the workers for the everyday hazards they will encounter in the course of their jobs. Suffice it to say that it is simply having safety orientation knowledge which would help and guide the employee to carry out his/her job responsibilities without getting hurt (Grant, S., 2013).

The lack of safety orientation makes employees potential hazards to themselves and others. Proper safety orientation equips employees with the knowledge and skills to work safely and averts accidents caused by human errors.

Personal investigation from years of experience in the oil and gas industry has shown that people continue to hurt themselves when there is inadequate orientation about the jobs they do. As a result, many have either lost their lives or become incapacitated for life, while wading through unknown, and therefore unmitigated, hazards associated with their jobs.

Most of these accidents are preventable, only if the individuals involved were given proper and adequate safety orientation cum training. In addition to this, most of the victims interviewed in the course of this study see accidents as inevitable. This of course is a wrong perception, as zero could be attainable in the area of accidents when proper training and the culture of safety orientation have been imbibed and adopted by everyone within the organization.

2.0 WHAT IS SAFETY ORIENTATION?

Orientation simply means to guide someone or a group of people in a specific direction. Thus, a safety orientation could be defined as a communication process to guide and direct people or personnel in a specific way to perform their duties and roles safely without putting themselves in harm's way or getting themselves or others injured (Grant, S., 2011).

In addition to the above definition, Safety Orientation is the process of introducing new, inexperienced, transferred and returning employees to a safe and healthy workplace by using various methods and media to drive home the elements of the safety orientation for more effectiveness. Everyone needs orientation, whether in the public life, private life, or within the corporate operations.

This paper will be focused primarily on safety orientation as it affects Nigeria and the oil & gas industry, for both personnel in the public space and the employees in the industry.

3.0 THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC AND THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE SAFETY ORIENTATION

In recent years, heartbreaking stories of accidents and injuries have continued to plague our communities. These incidents do not only cause immense human suffering but also inflict lasting damage on our environment. It is imperative that we put an end to this disturbing trend and usher in a culture of safety consciousness. One undeniable truth emerges: achieving zero accidents is not just a lofty ideal but an entirely feasible goal. The key lies in providing the public with proper safety orientation and fostering a collective mindset where safety becomes our way of life, our *modus vivendi*, and *modus operandi*.

The role of the Nigerian public in ensuring safety cannot be overstated. By arming individuals with the knowledge and awareness of potential hazards, we can significantly reduce the occurrence of accidents. It is a shared responsibility that requires a collaborative effort between the government, regulatory bodies, and citizens.

3.1 Legislation and Comprehensive Safety Orientation

To initiate this transformative change, it is crucial for the National Assembly, working with relevant industrial and government stakeholders, to enact legislation specifically focused on Health, Safety, and Environment (HSE). Urgent legislative action is needed to formalize the importance of safety in our society. Collaborating with relevant government agencies, the National Assembly can roll out fit-for-purpose comprehensive safety orientation packages that reach every corner of our nation.

3.2 The Power of Informed Citizens

We firmly believe that an informed public is a safe public. If we invest in educating, say 96% of our citizens, about safety regarding the activities they choose to undertake, we can address significant majority of the factors contributing to accidents in Nigeria. This education should cover various aspects, including workplace safety, road safety, home safety, and public safety protocols. By instilling a deep understanding of potential risks and the necessary precautions, we empower individuals to make safer choices in their daily lives.

3.3 Promoting Safety as a Way of Life

Moreover, safety orientation should not be limited to specific industries or professions. It should be integrated into our educational curriculum, workplace training programs, and public awareness campaigns. By embedding safety practices into the fabric of our society, we can cultivate a generation that inherently values and prioritizes safety. This cultural shift will ripple through generations, creating a safer environment for everyone.

The path to an injury-free culture in Nigeria begins with empowering our citizens through comprehensive safety orientation. Legislative support and active collaboration between governmental bodies and the public are pivotal in achieving this goal. Let us work together to make safety not just a priority but a way of life for every Nigerian.

4.0 STRENGTHENING REGULATORY OVERSIGHT FOR EFFECTIVE SAFETY ORIENTATION IN NIGERIA

In the wake of historical tragedies like the Piper Alpha disaster in the North Sea, the role of regulators, both governmental and corporate, has undergone significant transformation. A prime example of this evolution is the shift from rigid, prescriptive legislation to a collaborative approach emphasizing self-regulation. Companies, in conjunction with regulatory bodies, now collaborate to establish tailored safety standards, ushering in an era where safety is a shared responsibility. The lessons drawn from incidents like the Piper Alpha tragedy have prompted substantial improvements in safety orientation within corporate entities, yet a glaring disparity remains, notably within governmental agencies.

4.1 The Need for Governmental Safety Orientation

Surprisingly, governmental bodies and their agencies lag in adopting robust safety orientation practices, a trend that demands urgent rectification. This discrepancy is particularly concerning given the stringent measures enforced by entities like the police and Federal Road Safety, emphasizing

punitive actions such as fines, license suspensions, and even imprisonment to uphold road safety though there is still room for improvement in Nigeria even in these areas. The lack of vigor in safety orientation within government spheres is a clear anomaly that requires immediate attention.

4.2. Corporate Initiatives and Challenges

Corporate organizations, especially within the oil and gas industry, have displayed commendable efforts in safety orientation. Regular orientation training programs for employees and the wider Nigerian public have been a cornerstone of these endeavors. Despite these concerted efforts, the desired positive outcomes have not been fully realized. However, these initiatives signify a step in the right direction, one that holds immense promise if sustained and enhanced.

4.3 The Way Forward

To bridge the existing gaps in safety orientation, a comprehensive strategy is very important. Firstly, governmental agencies must adopt a proactive approach, and not reactive. Safety orientation should be ingrained within the very fabric of public administration, fostering a culture where safety is paramount.

Secondly, collaboration between corporate organizations and regulatory bodies should be intensified. By sharing best practices and refining existing safety standards, a unified approach can be established, ensuring a consistent and effective safety orientation across the sectors.

Thirdly, sustained efforts from corporate organizations are vital. While commendable steps have been taken, continuous innovation and adaptation in safety training methods are necessary. Embracing modern technologies and interactive learning platforms can enhance the efficacy of these programs, making them more engaging and impactful.

The evolution of safety orientation, as exemplified by tragedies like the Piper Alpha incident, demands a holistic and concerted effort from both regulators and corporate entities. By prioritizing safety, enforcing stringent standards, and embracing innovative approaches, Nigeria can pave the way for a safer, more secure future, where accidents are minimized, and lives are safeguarded.

5.0 SAFETY ORIENTATION FOR THE WORKPLACE EMPLOYEES

Safety orientation for employees is not just a routine procedure; it is the foundation upon which a secure and productive work environment is built. The significance of safety orientation is underscored by the fact that it should commence even before an employee sets foot in the workplace. An effective safety orientation program is not merely a checklist of rules but a well-crafted introduction to the company and the potential hazards associated with its operations.

5.1 The First Impression

When new employees join the company, they are bombarded with new information, shaping their attitudes toward the company, their jobs, policies, security, and fellow employees. A certain impression, good or bad, is formed, regardless of whether the company actively provides orientation training. To foster a culture of safety and ensure high performance, it is imperative that the company provides the right kind of start.

5.2 Key Components of Safety Orientation

5.2.1. Management Commitment: Employees must understand that management is sincerely committed to preventing accidents. Regardless of the source of their paycheck, a zero-tolerance policy

toward accidents should be in place. Leaders must “walk-the-talk.” Employees should see from the body language of the management that safety truly comes first, even above production.

5.2.2. Prevention is Possible: Employees should be aware that while accidents might occur, they are preventable. Proper safeguarding of equipment and continuous identification and elimination of workplace hazards are ongoing efforts.

5.2.3. Empowerment and Reporting: Employees are empowered to intervene and report at-risk behaviors and conditions. They should feel confident in their ability to speak up and ensure a safe working environment. Empowerment should come from the highest position of leadership within the organization.

5.2.4. Supervisor Guidance: Clear job instructions from supervisors are essential. No employee should undertake a task until they have received proper training and authorization from their supervisor.

5.2.5. Responsibility and Reporting: If an employee suffers an injury, no matter how minor, it must be reported to the supervisor immediately. Every injury and occupational illness can be prevented, and reporting is crucial for prevention. It should be clearly understood that no employee shall be victimized for reporting near-misses, incidents, and/or at-risk behaviors.

5.2.6. Proactive Attitude: Employees should be encouraged to rectify unsafe conditions rather than ignoring them. Taking responsibility / ownership for safety and being proactive in addressing hazards are fundamental.

5.2.7. Continuous Learning: Employees are encouraged to ask questions if they are unclear about a process or job. Clarity and understanding are essential for safe execution. On no account should an employee undertake a job that appears to him/her to be unsafe. The employee should feel comfortable speaking up about the safety concerns and resist any pressure to do the job he/she perceives to be unsafe. The employee should feel protected from being victimized in doing so.

5.2.8. Incident-Free Mindset: Cultivating an incident-free mindset is vital. Avoiding situations where one could be in harm's way ("line of fire") and embracing a proactive safety attitude are crucial.

5.2.9. Team Spirit: Employees must recognize that an injury to one is an injury to all. Fostering a sense of collective responsibility enhances the overall safety culture within the organization.

A robust safety orientation program sets the tone for a secure and productive workplace. By instilling these principles in employees from the beginning, organizations can create a safety-conscious workforce that not only understands the risks but actively engages in preventing accidents. Empowering employees with the knowledge, tools, and mindset for safety ensures a workplace where everyone can thrive while minimizing risks.

6.0 TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES FROM LACK OF ADEQUATE SAFETY ORIENTATION

Incidents detailed below serve as stark reminders of the devastating consequences when individuals lack adequate safety orientation. These tragedies could have been avoided if the victims had been educated about the hazards associated with their respective activities. Each incident underscores the critical importance of proper safety training and awareness to prevent accidents and save lives.

6.1 Carbon Monoxide Tragedies: In separate incidents, unawareness of carbon monoxide dangers led to devastating outcomes. Two tailors and a family of five lost their lives when generators were operated indoors without proper ventilation, leading to carbon monoxide poisoning.

6.2 Confined Space Hazards: In a construction site, lack of knowledge about confined space dangers proved fatal. Workers operating in an excavation without adequate ventilation faced carbon monoxide exposure, leading to two deaths and severe injury to three others.

6.3 Electrocution and Falling Accidents: In construction settings, ignorance of safety protocols led to severe injuries and property damage. A worker sustained serious injuries after a forklift accident involving power lines, and a fall from a building resulted in permanent disability for another worker.

6.4 Fire Incidents: Lack of adherence to safety guidelines caused fire-related incidents. A cutting worker's negligence sparked a fire, causing substantial asset damage, while an oil & gas employee lost his life due to improper electrical isolation procedures inside a confined space.

6.5 Drowning and Falling Objects: Ignoring safety precautions led to fatal accidents during construction activities. A worker drowned after falling overboard while not wearing a Personal Floatation Device (PFD), emphasizing the importance of water safety. Another employee lost his life due to falling materials, highlighting the significance of proper load securing techniques.

6.6 Failure to Isolate Hazardous Energy: An employee in an oil & gas company died a horrible death while cleaning a mud pit in a confined space, without applying the "lock-out-tag-out" (LOTO) electrical isolation principles, which includes de-energizing the mud agitators. Another worker inadvertently turned on the mud agitators, which crushed the victim inside the mud pit, leading to a fatality.

6.7 Importance of Safety Orientation: These incidents emphasize the critical role of safety orientation in every facet of work. Employees need to comprehend the dangers inherent in their tasks and the necessary precautions to stay safe. Comprehensive safety training, encompassing everything from carbon monoxide awareness to proper use of safety equipment, is fundamental. Moreover, fostering a safety-conscious mindset, where employees actively recognize and mitigate risks, is paramount.

The tragedies recounted here serve as painful reminders of the cost of ignorance in the face of workplace hazards. It is incumbent upon employers, regulatory bodies, and employees themselves to prioritize safety orientation. By imparting the necessary knowledge and instilling a culture of vigilance, we can prevent such devastating incidents, ensuring a safer working environment for everyone. Let these incidents not be in vain; let them be catalysts for a future where safety orientation is not just a requirement but a life-saving necessity.

7.0 WIDER IMPLICATIONS OF LACK OF ADEQUATE SAFETY TRAINING

Inadequate safety orientation and training not only jeopardize the individual employee but reverberate through families, communities, and companies, leaving an indelible impact on everyone involved. The consequences of poor safety awareness are far-reaching and devastating, affecting physical and mental well-being, financial stability, and even societal harmony.

7.1. Physical and Psychological Suffering: The immediate aftermath of an accident is marked by physical pain and emotional trauma. Survivors grapple with both physical injuries and the psychological scars of the incident, leading to a prolonged and often painful recovery process.

7.2. Disability and Loss of Life: Accidents can result in disabilities ranging from Permanent Partial Disability (PPD) to Permanent Total Disability (PTD) or, tragically, fatality. Such incidents shatter lives and families, leaving a void that can never be filled. The loss of life not only brings grief but also financial instability to the victim's immediate family, often pushing them into poverty and despair.

7.3. Impact on Earning Power: Survivors may face a significant reduction in their earning potential. Relegated to restricted duties or lower-grade positions, they find themselves unable to earn at their previous capacity, further exacerbating financial strain and limiting their future prospects.

7.4. Loss of Leisure Activities and Quality of Life: Accidents snatch away the simple joys of life, including engaging in leisure activities and recreational sports. The loss of these activities deepens the psychological impact, leading to a diminished quality of life for the affected individuals and their families.

7.5. Financial Burden on Families: Beyond immediate medical expenses, accidents impose a substantial financial burden on families. Education, housing, and even daily sustenance become unaffordable, leading to a cycle of poverty and potential social issues within the family and community.

7.6. Impact on Companies

7.6.1. Loss of Reputation: Companies with poor safety records suffer damage to their reputation, eroding the trust of both employees and clients. Public perception is crucial, and accidents tarnish a company's image, making it difficult to attract and retain talent.

7.6.2 Loss of Time and Productivity: Accidents disrupt workflows, leading to loss of valuable work hours and productivity. Time spent dealing with accidents and their aftermath detracts from the company's core objectives, hindering progress and growth.

7.6.3. Financial Liabilities: Companies are burdened with substantial costs related to medical bills, compensation, and potential legal fees. Budget allocations must be made to cover medical expenses, and, in the unfortunate event of an employee's death, the costs associated with burials.

7.6.4. Redundancy and Impact on Government Revenue: In cases of severe disability, employees might become redundant, impacting the government's tax revenue in some countries where the disabled and unemployed are supported by the government. Unemployment due to accidents adds to the economic strain, affecting both individual families and the nation's economy.

The consequences of poor safety orientation extend far beyond the immediate victim. They touch every aspect of life, from the individual's physical and mental well-being to the financial stability of families and the reputation and productivity of companies. Adequate safety training is not just a legal requirement; it is a moral imperative that safeguards lives, preserves dignity, and ensures a prosperous and harmonious society.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The importance of safety orientation cannot be overemphasized, especially for new employees entering the workforce. To ensure a safer workplace, the following recommendations are very important:

8.1 Comprehensive Safety Orientation: Implement adequate and thorough safety orientation programs utilizing diverse methods such as video clips, pep talks, and posters/slogans. These varied approaches ensure effective communication to individuals with different learning styles.

8.2 Mentorship Programs: Assign experienced mentors to guide new employees until they are well-acquainted with their roles and responsibilities. Avoid deploying two inexperienced individuals together; instead, always provide a mentor to ensure proper guidance and supervision.

8.3 Visual Identification: Introduce a visual identifier, such as a sticker on colored hard hats, labeling new employees as “Green Horns,” or “Green Hands.” Use of consistent colors across hard hats will aid in easy identification for quick assistance when required.

8.4 Legislative Support: Advocate for stringent laws mandating companies to provide safety training for their employees. The government should enforce these regulations to ensure compliance by inflicting penalties for non-compliance.

8.5 Government Initiatives: Government agencies, including the National Orientation Agency of Nigeria, should intensify awareness campaigns through jingles, emphasizing the importance of Safety & Orientation in the country.

8.6 Enforcement: Strengthen enforcement mechanisms, penalizing companies that neglect safety orientation/training. Heavy fines or license withdrawals should be imposed, setting a precedent for others to prioritize safety training.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS

The above recommendations necessitate strong governmental support for effective implementation. Proper safety orientation training can yield numerous benefits, shaping a workplace culture rooted in safety consciousness and good practices. A workforce trained in safety orientation achieves:

1. **Accident Prevention:** A workplace free from accidents and injuries.
2. **Injury-Free HSE Culture:** Encouraging a culture where Health, Safety, and Environment are paramount.
3. **Positive Public and Corporate Image:** Enhancing the reputation of companies and public institutions.
4. **Heightened Productivity:** A well-trained workforce leads to enhanced productivity and efficiency.
5. **Protection of Assets:** Safeguarding public and company property from damage.
6. **Increased HSE Awareness:** Raising awareness about Health, Safety, and Environment concerns.
7. **Continuity in Business:** Ensuring business continuity and sustainability.
8. **Job Satisfaction:** Fostering job satisfaction among employees due to their enhanced safety and well-being.

Employees and the public, being closest to job activities, play a pivotal role in safety management. Modern governance emphasizes orientation training as a cornerstone of a secure workplace. However, for these initiatives to succeed, strong governmental support and political willpower are essential.

As a collective responsibility, let us prioritize safety orientation. By doing so, accidents and incidents will become relics of the past, fostering a safer, more secure environment for all in our nation. Together, we can create a future where every individual returns home safely and every workplace is a sanctuary of well-being.

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