

Occupational Hazards

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America's
SAFEST
COMPANIES

America's SAFEST COMPANIES

World-Class Safety

by Sandy Smith with additional reporting
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What is world-class safety? Ask 10 people and you could receive 10 different answers, and probably all of them would be right on target.

The 2003 American Society of Safety Engineers Professional Development Conference offered an interesting and timely roundtable discussion on this very topic. While the participants' answers to the question varied, they agreed upon several companies that in their estimation, defined world-class safety.

Three of those companies mentioned – Bechtel Group Inc., DuPont and Johnson & Johnson – were chosen as America's Safest Companies by OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS this year. Some of the people quoted in the following articles – and who work at some of America's Safest Companies – attended that session, perhaps to see if their safety process measured up to the 'big boys' of safety, or perhaps to discover ways to improve already stellar safety programs.

From tiny Quincy Compressor of Bay Minette, Ala., with its 141 employees, to mighty Johnson & Johnson, with 108,000 employees in 54 countries, what do America's Safest Companies 2003 have in common? They all treat safety as a business value. Not a priority. Not a process. Not a program. A value.

"When you prioritize something, that means it's not always going to be at the top of your list. A core value is woven into everything you do, every business decision you make," says Kevin S.

Berg, principal vice president and manager of Environmental, Safety and Health Services at Bechtel.

"Safety is considered a very essential part of our business functions," reveals Chris Andrews, safety and training coordinator at Bon L Manufacturing of Newnan, Ga.

In addition, many of the 2003 class of America's Safest Companies use safety as a measure of business success. "Safety is a key indicator of organizational excellence. A safe plant typically has high employee morale, high productivity and minimal product defects," says Joseph Van Houten, Ph.D., CSP, worldwide director of Planning, Process Design and Delivery, Johnson & Johnson Safety & Industrial Hygiene.

Others acknowledge that business success would not be possible without a safe workplace and safe workers. James A. Buzzard, the president of MeadWestvaco, calls employees "the most important resource we have and we depend on them for the success of MeadWestvaco. Implementing the processes and systems for safety excellence, and integrating them into our everyday activities, develops safe behavior and a safe workplace for our employees."

Chosen by our editors based on input from industry and professional associations, EHS and industry insiders, OSHA's Voluntary Protection Program and our research, the 16 companies honored this year as America's Safest Companies share another commonality: None of them intend to rest on their laurels.

Because, says Keith Shumacher, plant manager at Quincy Compressor, safety "is a race with no finish."

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Bechtel: Striving to be the Best

At Bechtel Group Inc., the challenge is protecting 47,000 employees in 35 countries from injury and illness while tackling massive construction projects such as rebuilding the infrastructure of Iraq.

A partial list of safety awards won by Bechtel Group Inc. covers seven pages of single-spaced type. This is a company that is doing safety well.

But not quite well enough, says Kevin S. Berg, principal vice president and manager of Environmental, Safety and Health Services at the engineering and construction services company. "Bechtel is dedicated to the concept that all accidents are preventable," he says. Accordingly, the company is committed to "achieving and sustaining zero accident performance through continuous improvement," he adds.

While the company might not have achieved zero accidents, it is getting closer every year. In 1992, the lost workday case rate for Bechtel North America was 0.63, and Bureau of Labor Statistics' average lost workday case for SIC Code 1620, Heavy Construction, was 5.3. Ten years later, the lost workday case rate for Bechtel North America is 0.17, while the national average for SIC Code 1620 is 4.0.

Just a few years ago, says Berg, Bechtel was a reactive organization that dealt with problems and challenges as they came up. "The reason we're receiving the recognition for safety that we are today is that 10 years ago, we adopted a systems approach to environment, safety and health (ESH) – a more holistic approach – which put us in a preventive mode rather than a reactive mode," Berg asserts. "About two years ago, we developed a process that integrates ES&H into the planning of a project, even down to whether the project is a 'go' or 'no go.'"

Safety was always a priority at Bechtel, says Berg, but in recent years, it has changed from a priority to a corporate value. "When you prioritize something, that means it's not always going to be at the top of your list. A core value is woven into everything you do, every business decision you make."

While they were creating a business culture that values safety, Bechtel's top manage-

ment found that its "support" for occupational safety and health was, surprisingly, not what the company or safety process needed.

"Safety was like a high performance sporting event, where supporters buy tickets. Ultimately, the supporters sit in the stands and cheer on the teams," Berg explains. "We wanted management engaged in the game, on the field, walking the talk.

"Don't just demonstrate support," he urges other managers. "Demonstrate pride in ownership."

Developing a Safety System

To integrate safety into the corporate culture and make it a core value of the company, Bechtel management took several steps, including:

- Develop a real understanding of an integrated system. What did it mean to integrate safety into the business? How did that impact planning at all levels? "We had to have a much better understanding of what ES&H meant to the process," says Berg.

- Institute a behavioral-based safety program. "In 1994-95, we contacted a number of behavior-based safety training companies to come in and talk to us,"

Berg remembers. "They all said, 'It won't work for construction. You have too many variables: the work process, the short duration of the work, the

changing workforce.' We didn't accept that answer. Our organization is not afraid to look at new tools and materials or seek out and apply leading-edge technology where it hasn't previously been viewed as viable. The key elements of behavior-based safety work for construction, even in countries with cultures far removed from the traditional safety process."

When the smoke cleared, Bechtel's occupational safety and health program had several key elements:

- Management commitment to ownership of, participation in and accountability for ES&H performance.

- Consistent expectations that are communicated through the organization.

Bechtel Group Inc., San Francisco
Engineering/Construction Services
47,000 employees in 35 countries
Approximately 1,000 EHS professionals company-wide



DENNIS BRACKBLACK STAR

Bechtel engineering services personnel don fall protection for a construction project to provide additional diesel generators at a site in Lusby, Md.



Safety is on the job at this Zinc mine development project in Australia.

At the Calpine Sutter Fossil Power Plant in Yuba City, Calif., safety was included in the entire planning process for the project.



- Establishment of standard operating procedures and commitment to continuous improvement through adoption and implementation of industry best practices.

- Global reporting of ES&H performance.

- Commitment to internal development of ES&H professionals with diverse experience and broad skill base.

- Development and implementation of a behavior-based safety program.

- Participation in selected professional organizations worldwide (American Society of Safety Engineers, etc.)

One of the reasons the change occurred, he admits, is that some of Bechtel's more sophisticated customers began talking in terms of integrating safety performance with business planning. "We learned a lot from customers in the petrochemical industry," says Berg. "They are proactive about safety. They have to be."

Planning for Safety

Making safety a core value means that safety is included in the entire planning process for a project, from systems design and engineering to personal protective equipment (PPE) choices and the hiring of subcontractors. What makes the process interesting, Berg admits, is that many of Bechtel's projects are outside the United States, where cultures and a lack of resources can present a challenge.

Contractors – even those in other countries – working on projects managed by Bechtel are expected to meet the same stringent safety requirements as the Bechtel employees working on the project.

"ES&H truly needs to be owned by the entire enterprise," says Berg. "You can't treat subcontractors differently." He adds that occupational safety and health is not always highly valued in some of the countries where Bechtel does business, and the company has made it a mission to spread its message of safety.

In Iraq, where Bechtel has the lead role in rebuilding the country's infrastructure, the

the subcontractors were initially bewildered by the company's insistence on a goal of zero accidents.

"They nodded 'yes,' but they didn't really understand it," says Berg. "We explained it to them like this: 'We don't have the right to expect some type of injury or human suffering as a result of our doing business.' It made a big difference." Those subcontractors will become the safety leaders in their own countries and mentor other companies, says Berg. He's seen it happen before.

Berg said subcontractors are often astounded at Bechtel's insistence on the use of proper PPE, even if that PPE isn't available in that country. So how does a company doing business in 35 countries include PPE in the planning process when appropriate PPE isn't available? Berg says, "If some type of PPE is required, then we provide it and find the most user-friendly, comfortable and best quality available."

In some countries, it is so difficult to find safety equipment meeting the standards required by Bechtel that the company had to take matters into its own hands. Bechtel developed the MPEG – Multiple Project Acquisition Group – to serve as a central store of safety equipment. A project manager working in a country with few resources for safety equipment can order what he needs through MPEG and it is shipped out without delay.

"Too many companies tell employees they're responsible for safety. An employee's ability to respond [to safety challenges] depends on their education and training, giving them the authority to do what is necessary to work safely, and the resources and equipment they need," stresses Berg.

company wants to excel not just in providing management technology, but in providing safety technology as well. The company introduced new types of PPE, a systematic approach to safety and the concept of zero accidents to its subcontractors in Iraq. Berg admits

Communication is Key

Bechtel tries to communicate about safety "using every avenue available," says Kevin Berg. Weekly safety meetings for employees and regular management safety meetings keep all employees updated on safety issues. High performance teams chaired by top executives brainstorm ways to improve safety, highlight best practices and examine challenges.

Monthly safety statistics are distributed to Bechtel sites, but, cautions Berg, "If you're chasing statistics, then you're constantly searching for the 'flavor of the month' safety program."

The monthly *Bechtel Globe* newspaper provides extensive coverage of SE&H topics, while *Bechtel Briefs*, with a safety message, comes out three times a year. The company also sends out a wellness letter that includes information for families. When computers at Bechtel locations boot up, the first message the user sees pertains to safety. Those messages change weekly.

In addition, Bechtel draws families into the safety process by holding picnics and other company sponsored events, including safety weekends and safety fairs that are open to the surrounding community.