

If it ain't broke, don't fix it

Regular news reports remind the Risk Manager how sadly or horribly wrong the title of this Tip can be.

San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system experienced a nasty incident on New Year's Day, 2009, when a police officer fatally shot a passenger. Let's not dwell on the details of what happened, but focus on the consequences of a "mistake" or "accident" to any business or organization.

Recent reports reveal BART has already spent over \$6 million on a wide range of "fixes" with more – perhaps much more – to come. Costs run the gamut from customer loyalty training and teaching employees how to deal with today's youth, to trauma counselors, investigations, delays, "administrative leaves of absence," staff departures, and an outside legal firm's assessment to create Action Plans. Vendors are complaining about unfair contracts, and lawsuits are running their course. It's certain that management distraction is extreme.

The cost of fixes ~

Safety professionals know it costs \$6 to \$10 to "fix" a safety problem or accident that would have cost \$1 to prevent. This story is the same – just outside the realm of safety. When something goes wrong, everyone runs for the CYA training and assessments and investigations. Do you think those fixes might cost more when you're in "crisis-mode" than, say, a year earlier?

Even if it ain't broke, consider fixing it ~

Why is it so hard for business organizations to do this? Why does someone have to die before we begin to pay attention? Here are some practical, effective fixes you can actually implement, not just talk about.

- Set up an employee safety committee to get everyone involved, empower them, provide a (small) budget and highlight their recommendations.

Touring a client's factory, I noticed a woman at a high-speed drill-type machine. Her long hair was loose and a gust of wind could have had ghastly consequences. I asked if she'd forgotten her hat or hairnet; she replied, "Gee I never thought about that."

- Encourage workers to report unsafe conditions or concerns of any kind without fear of reprisal – then take appropriate action and document the file.
- Encourage training and continued learning, and not just in technical areas. An example might be a short course on "Having Difficult Conversations" offered at some community colleges. If you can't pay for it, provide flexible time for classes and study and always highlight successes.

Can you avoid getting blindsided?

Colin Powell says this Tip's title is "the slogan of the complacent, the arrogant or the scared." The Risk Manager finds there's a lot of easy, cheap talk and little action.

Move to action! I'd appreciate your thoughts, stories or concerns.