

HRA 330: Module 1 Lecture Notes

Again, welcome to this course on risk management. Human resources can create a competitive advantage for an organization. A competitive advantage is something that a company can do differently from its competitors that allows it to perform better, survive, and succeed in its industry. Thus, the safety of these human resources in the workplace should be a priority! Let's explore some foundational concepts and begin with laying the foundation for our understanding.

Is safety important to the organization? Definitely! Let's consider where safety and health awareness first began. Think back to a time long ago! In the times of the ancient Babylonians around 2000 BC, their ruler Hammurabi developed the Code of Hammurabi. So why was this code so important? It set the precedence for others regarding dealing with injuries, allowable fees for physicians, and monetary damages assessed against those who injured others. One key clause in this code sustained the concern for properly handling injuries: "If a man has caused the loss of a gentleman's eye, his own eye shall be caused to be lost." The Romans were also concerned with safety and health as we know from the remains of their civilizations. They built aqueducts, sewage systems, public baths, latrines, and well-ventilated houses.

During the Industrial Revolution, there were major changes that occurred. Steam power and other power sources meant that business could now be mechanized. These power sources, called inanimate power, replaced people and animal power. Humans interacted with machines to ensure proper functioning and maintenance of them. This meant that humans were more and more specialized in their jobs, and oftentimes, there was a substitution of machines for people.

As you will see from the chapters for this module, there is a vast history of milestones in the evolution of the safety movement in the U.S. Another significant impact was the implementation of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act) of 1970. Pressure was placed on legislatures to create controls on organizations to address potentially life-threatening conditions within the workplace. This Act is said to have had, and still has, the greatest impact on safety within the U.S. Further details on OSHA and the implications for organizations will be discussed throughout this course.

We need to take into consideration some unfortunate tragedies that have occurred, which had a significant impact on the safety movement within the U.S. These accidents brought to light the importance of safety within the workplace. The first is the Hawk's Nest Tragedy. This tragedy was the result of drilling through silica rock in West Virginia. Workers spent hours breathing the dust created by drilling and blasting through the mountainside. This was an unknown hazard at the time, but workers began dying after a year of being exposed. To make matters even worse, the company tried to cover up the documentation regarding who had died from exposure. This led to public outcry regarding the situation, and the U.S. Department of Labor got involved to provide leadership, naming silicosis and compensable diseases under workers' compensation. Is this still a concern today? Certainly! For example, organizations such as Anheuser Busch provide training on "deadly dust" for brewers who work with grains and hops in the brewing process as part of their rigorous OSHA programs.

Another tragedy is that of asbestos. This material, once considered a "miracle fiber," was looked up to be beneficial in the construction of various buildings, ships, and automobiles. The effects of working with asbestos were not immediately identified. However, through scientific research, it has been connected to many different cancers and diseases, such as lung, gastrointestinal tract, larynx, pharynx, kidneys, pancreas, gall bladder, and bile ducts. Lawsuits have changed the way the industry deals with the "miracle fiber," and there is industry-wide effort to protect workers from harm!

1984, tons of cyanide leaked from a faulty valve at the Bhopal plant in India. The resulting noxious cloud killed more than 3,000 sleeping people. Union Carbide was charged with criminal negligence in the situation. In this case, the employer chose to locate their operation where safety was not strictly enforced. These situations clearly illustrate the need for safety protocols and rule enforcement within organizations.

In the workplace today, there are many different types of accident prevention programs. Depending on the risks associated with accidents, these risks drive what preventative programs the organization implements. Some of these techniques to reduce accidents include failure minimization, fail-safe designs, isolation, lockouts, screening, personal protective equipment, redundancy, and timed replacements.

Early programs were based on the 3 Es of safety: engineering, education, and enforcement. Engineering aspects of the safety program involve making design improvements to both product and process. If you alter the design of a product, the process used to make it could be less dangerous.

Education is a must! Employees need to know how to work safely on the job and why this is important.

Enforcement ensures that employees abide by the safety policies, rules, regulations, practices, and procedures. When there is an accident that happens, the organization must consider if it was an unsafe working condition or an unsafe act committed by the employee. We will discuss this in further details later in the course.

Costs of accidents in the U.S. are staggering! Most accidents are said to be preventable, just think about the \$150 billion that is spent on lost wages, medical expenses, insurance costs, fire damage, vehicle damage, and so forth. Businesses will lose around 35 million work hours! These numbers are staggering. Could this money be put to better use elsewhere just by eliminating accidents? This money would be available for more productive uses! More importantly, is the focus on the people? Preventing accidents also means preventing human suffering. Moral and ethical standards concerning the treatment of workers must be a priority! Review in the textbook the various injuries that workers may experience in the workplace. This clearly shows why preventing workplace accidents is important!

So why is all of this important? Organizations want to ensure the health and safety of workers in the workplace! At Anheuser Busch, their first priority, above and beyond anything else, is SAFETY! Their values were safety, quality, and sanitation. Why would they put safety first? Well, I would ask you – WHY NOT? You may think that the organization may suffer if they put quality behind safety. But if the organization is not taking care of the employees from a workplace safety standpoint, the quality of the product will be impacted. Remember, we want the employees all to go home with all their “parts and pieces” that they came to work with. This minimizes both financial impacts as well as unnecessary human suffering!