5 Steps to Implementing Safety Training

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A lot of companies want to get it right.

But it isn't easy. Despite good intentions to comply with Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) training requirements, companies find themselves struggling with several challenges.

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OSHA Safety and Health Standards

Many safety and health standards shaped by OSHA explicitly require employers to provide related training to their employees. Other OSHA standards ask employers to limit certain job assignments to employees who are "certified," "competent" or "qualified," which means they need to have specific training — whether in or out of the workplace.

This may seem burdensome, but the standards exist for a good reason—ask any business owner who has experienced a workplace fatality, serious injury, or brought harm to public through their products. The purpose of the training required by OSHA is to reduce occupational injuries and illnesses, and save lives. Since 1970, when Congress first passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act and established OSHA, occupational injuries and illnesses have decreased from 10.9 incidents per 100 workers to 2.8 in 2019. Similarly, workplace fatalities have decreased from 38 per day in 1970 to only 15 a day in 2019.

Since 1970, when Congress first passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act and established OSHA, occupational injuries and illnesses have decreased by 74% and workplace fatalities have decreased by 60%.

www.osha.gov/data/commonstats
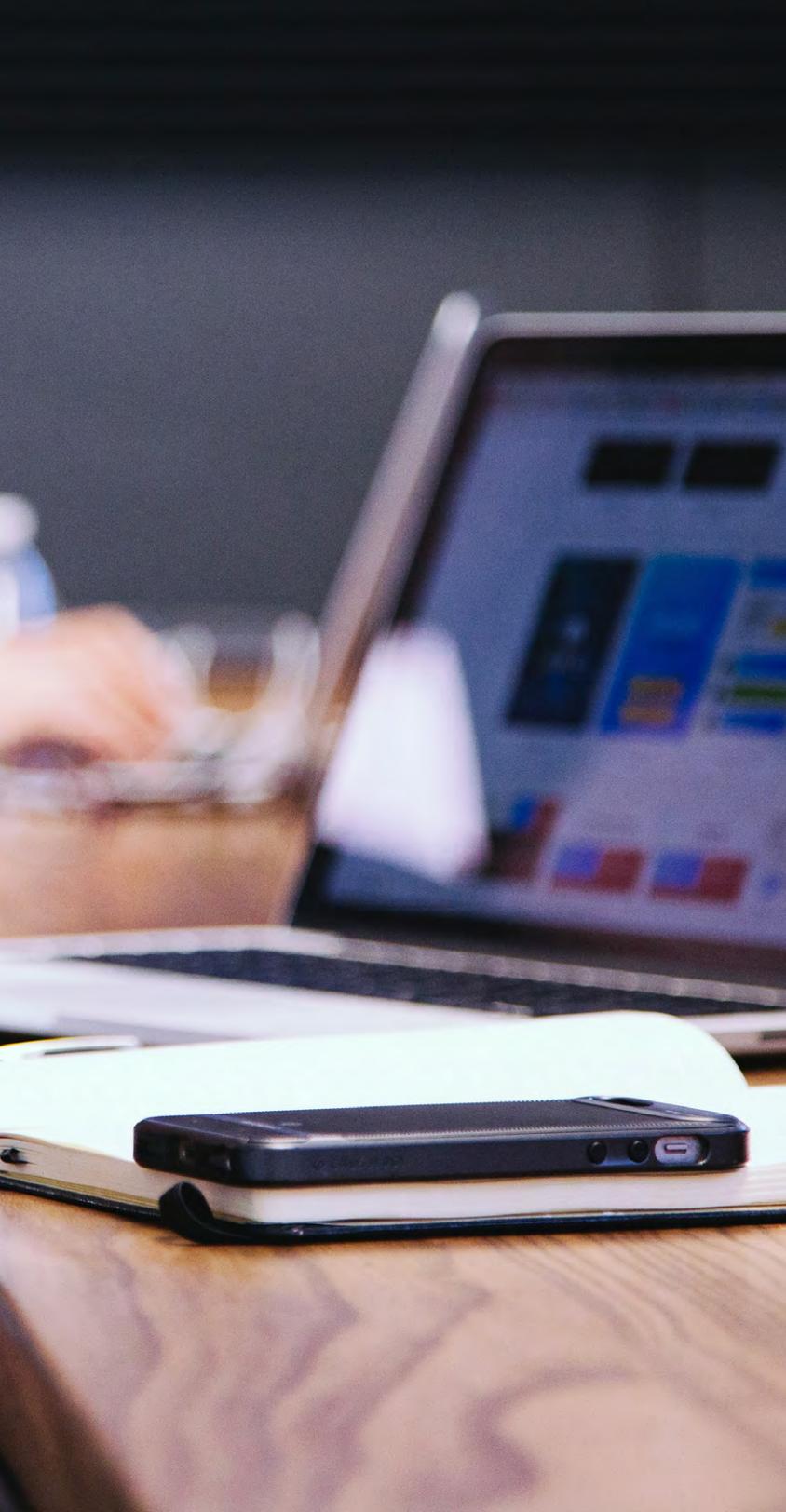
The Online Workforce Training Experience

Businesses who provide tools for training and safety assessment to measure success against regulatory requirements can limit liability and risk. Bad publicity is one of the greatest fears of any business because a single adverse event, like an accident, has negative business implications across the system—it can crush sales and drive away customers and partners, taking years to recover. But moving the workforce training experience online has proven to be an efficient, flexible way to deliver critical basic safety and health training. Online safety training is a tool for risk mitigation, and in highly regulated industries, there is a lot of risk.

Proven to be an efficient, flexible way to deliver critical basic safety and health training.

Five Critical Steps

It is challenging for large business models to comply with OSHA training requirements. Identifying the right training subjects, determining which employees need what training and how often, is confusing, particularly for large employers. Because of the diversity of training requirements and logistical problems of getting your people trained, administering safety and health training has always been a major operational problem for organizations. But you can bring efficiency and accountability to your organizational safety and health program, cutting risk and lowering liability, by taking these five critical steps.

Bring efficiency and accountability to your organizational safety and health program, cutting risk and lowering liability

1
Identify Regulatory Requirements

2
Identify Industry Standards

3
Provide Appropriate Safety and Health Training

4
Determine How to Deliver Training

5
Keep Training Records for Accountability

Sometimes meeting state and federal OSHA requirements is still not enough.

Step 1: Identify Regulatory Requirements

Meeting federal OSHA requirements is not always sufficient. Because all U.S. states have the option either to participate in the federal OSHA system or to create their own state occupational safety and health programs, each state has different requirements. Some states, like Tennessee, have a hybrid approach in which a state program has jurisdiction over general industry and construction, but federal OSHA retains jurisdiction over the maritime industry. Some state programs have standards similar to the federal OSHA system, and others have significantly different standards, like California's Cal-OSHA and Michigan's MI-OSHA.

The first step employers, health and safety professionals, and training and human resources departments need to take is to understand state requirements. OSHA's website provides a full list of state OSHA posters, which can be a starting point for learning about state OSHA requirements.

Sometimes meeting state and federal OSHA requirements is still not enough. If an employer recognizes a hazard that training would mitigate, the employer must protect its employees and the public by developing safeguards and providing the necessary training, regardless of whether an OSHA standard exists for that particular hazard or not—that's how you avoid incidents that damage the reputation of your business.

Step 2: Identify Industry Standards

Industries are not equal when it comes to health and safety training. Federal OSHA training requirements can be specific to the industry, workplace, or hazards associated with the sector of employment. Specific training requirements exist for certain industries:

Agriculture

Construction industry

Federal government

General industry

Maritime industry

More information about training requirements for these industries is available at the OSHA website. In addition, certain industries, such as mining, are covered by entirely different regulatory agencies. And in some situations, other regulations take precedence over OSHA standards; these include workers on a ship at sea, flight crews on an airplane, and truck drivers on the highway.

The key is to identify workplace safety and health hazards and to provide safeguards against them. OSHA requires companies to provide training in hazard recognition, mitigation techniques, and use of special equipment or procedures based on exposure or likelihood of exposure to workplace hazards. Training is suggested to match each company's' assessment of potential hazards for all aspects of operations, including facilities, equipment, products, materials, work procedures, processes, and exposure through independent contractors that can affect company employees.

Step 3: Provide Appropriate Safety and Health Training

A misconception exists that small businesses are exempt from providing occupational health and safety training. That's not true. All employers, regardless of size, must comply with OSHA rules and regulations, for reasons we've already mentioned. Although OSHA typically doesn't conduct inspections in companies with fewer than 10 employees, these companies are still subject to inspection when an employee or customer files a complaint, or when an injury occurs in the workplace. Some exceptions exist. For example, in some cases, small businesses may be exempt from implementing specific OSHA standards, like those requiring an OSHA injury/illness log or a written emergency action plan.

Know the regulations that apply to your business; ignorance is not an acceptable reason for non-compliance.

Step 3: Safety and Health Training, continued

Employers must provide training at several points in an employee's career, such as during new employee orientation, when an employee or contractor is newly assigned to a job where specific hazards exist, and when the hazards of a specific job change, like when new equipment is introduced, for example. Some types of safety and health training must be repeated periodically.

Although some regard safety and health training as a waste of money and time, training in the proper performance of a job is an investment that secures the prosperity of the enterprise. An effective safety and health training program can result in fewer injuries and illnesses, better morale, lower insurance premiums, and ensure overall safety.

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Step 4: Determine How to Deliver Training

When the necessary training has been identified, the employer must decide how to get the training delivered to the workforce. Developing training can be expensive because it needs to be created by qualified professionals, for relevancy and effectiveness.

Another consideration is the delivery method. The most common training options are live classroom training, led by instructors, and online training. Although live training can have many benefits, the costs of qualified trainers, of time away from the job for participants, and for facilities, add up quickly. And live training is not always consistent among different training classes, which can be a problem when new hazards are identified or when OSHA requirements have shifted. Online training is an easy, flexible, and inexpensive alternative for providing safety and health training—it's a great fit for businesses of any size.

Benefits of online training:

Saves money on consultants, travel, lodging, facility, printing, and lost productivity.

Minimizes disruption to normal business activities.

Reduces training time by up to 50%.

Allows employees to train at their own pace.

Provides continuous access, 24/7.

Can be scheduled during intermittent slack periods, for customer & business convenience.

Enables access from any location with an internet connection.

Delivers consistent content to all workers.

Automatically updates to match changes to regulatory requirements.

Step 5: Keep Training Records for Accountability

Employers must keep records of all safety and health training because records provide evidence of compliance with OSHA standards—recordkeeping is the best way to avoid and answer auditing concerns. Data and documentation provide answers to the first question an accident investigator asks in case of a workplace accident: "Was the employee trained to do the job?" One effective way to keep track of safety and health training compliance is to get training system software to deliver online training, and instantly, accurately, track training and build reports. This streamlines training administration, creating efficiency. A training system can provide fast, easy and accurate access to training records, which is particularly helpful when attempting to substantiate training compliance in the event of an inspection by federal or state compliance officers.

"Was the employee trained to do the job?"

About HSI

HSI is a leader in Environmental, Health and Safety (EHS) and workforce development software, training, and compliance solutions. HSI provides e-learning content, training capabilities, and cloud-based software, integrated to enable your business to improve safety, compliance, and employee development.

Across all industries, HSI helps safety and technical managers, human resources, first responders, and operational leaders train and develop their workforce, keep workers safe, and meet regulatory and operational compliance requirements. HSI's content and training solutions span categories from safety, technical and trade crafts, to employee and leadership soft skills, to CPR, first responder and active shooter. Their integrated suite of solutions, including learning management, safety management, chemical SDS management, and more, helps businesses not only train employees but monitor and manage multiple workflows in one system, with one partner.

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