Incentive programs are designed to help employees practice safe job behaviors and reduce the number and severity of accidents and injuries. However, if the program isn’t designed or implemented correctly, it will do little to truly reduce injuries or illnesses. In fact, poor program design and management can mask problems by encouraging underreporting and ignoring the root causes of workplace accidents.

The Dos and Don’ts of an Effective Safety Incentive Program

If your organization is considering a safety incentive program, keep these guidelines in mind:

**Measure success.**

*Don’t* base awards, rewards, celebrations or other employee incentives on injury or accident rates. Rewards based on these factors discourage full and timely reporting, which complicates accident investigations and can hide trends that should be addressed.

*Do* base rewards on completion of safety tasks or actions intended to reduce injuries, such as attending safety meetings, reporting near misses or making safety suggestions. If safe behavior is adequately and properly incentivized, the desired behaviors should increase.

**Be comprehensive.**

*Don’t* use an employee safety incentive program as a main component of or in place of a comprehensive safety program or other safety efforts.

*Do* develop a comprehensive safety program before implementing an incentive program. A comprehensive program should:

- assess organization’s risks and needs.
- establish and communicate management commitment to safety.

- form joint task force to encourage cooperation and buy-in.
- provide training for all supervisors and managers.
- conduct regular worksite analyses to chart progress.
- correct unsafe conditions and acts.
- perform effective accident investigations.
- implement workers’ compensation claims management.
- perform regular analysis of accomplishments and needs.

**Consider the cost.**

*Don’t* underestimate the cost of the program.

*Do* be sure that the funding of the program is sustainable. Eliminating the program due to its cost can cause employee backlash.

**Continued**

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Be consistent.

**Don’t** change the program frequently or without good cause. Changing the “rules of the game” can negatively impact morale if the rewards are suddenly more difficult to obtain or less valuable.

**Do** make sure you have planned out a program that the organization can follow for an extended time. Any changes should be clearly communicated to employees.

Keep it simple.

**Don’t** make the program overly complicated. Misunderstandings can undermine the effectiveness of the program and negatively impact morale.

**Do** make sure that all awards and the criteria for receiving them are clearly communicated and easily understood.

Be realistic and be prompt.

**Don’t** make the target too high or the awards too low, and **Don’t** put off giving awards when the time comes.

**Do** be sure the expectations are reasonable and reachable. Be sure the awards are of enough value to motivate most employees, and give them promptly when goals are met.

For Additional Information

**International Risk Management Institute:**
www.irmi.com

- Safety Incentive Programs:
  - A Critical Assessment

**University of Wisconsin Stout:**
www.uwstout.edu

- Safety Incentive Programs: A Case Study

**Occupational Health & Safety:**
www.ohsonline.com

- 7 Steps to Safety Incentive Success

Be patient.

**Don’t** expect too much too soon. It is irrational to expect that the program will immediately or entirely eliminate unsafe behaviors, workplace accidents and injuries.

**Do** anticipate that it will take time for the program to improve behavior, which will hopefully result in fewer accidents and injuries.

PLEASE NOTE: Consult your tax and/or legal advisor prior to instituting any incentive program with regard to the tax implications of the program.