

Sonoco Safety is now a way of life at Sonoco

Workplace safety is more than just good business at Sonoco, it is part of a culture that values the health and happiness of its employees.

Headquartered in South Carolina, USA, Sonoco packages surround some of the world's most recognisable brands found in pantries, stores and manufacturing plants virtually everywhere. In Australia and New Zealand, the company has nine manufacturing plants and approximately 300 employees.

Since 1980, Sonoco's global philosophy has been that all personal injuries can and must be prevented. In fact, the safety of employees ranks above production, quality, costs and service.

As part of this initiative, the DuPont Safety Training Observation Program (STOP) was implemented in Australasia in 1992. Steven Patrick, Plant Manager for Melbourne and Ulverstone, is the region's Occupational Health & Safety Manager and a strong advocate of workplace safety initiatives.

"If you look at our Worker's Compensation costs back in the early nineties, we had literally thousands of dollars being paid out, not only in premiums, but also other costs such as medical treatment," says Steven.

"However, more significantly, we had a culture that viewed workplace injuries as simply a part of the cost of doing business - that had to change. STOP really did help us learn that it's no good addressing things if no one is allowed to fix it, you have to find out what happened and who did it, and make them responsible and accountable."

Sonoco's Safety Policy can be found in the reception area of every plant and in some cases also out in the actual factory. This policy is driven by the Managing Director of the region, who heads the Regional Safety Steering Committee (RSSC). The RSSC involves all plant managers, safety coordinators and senior people, who meet once a month to talk about current programs, initiatives, and legislative requirements.

However, each plant manager has to drive the programs at plant level. In collaboration with employees they decide team strengths, areas for improvement and how to address them.



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"We are far more rigid in following procedures thanks to the DuPont training. One of the key aspects of the DuPont training is that safety is not just an issue at work, it's also important at home - it's an all-encompassing approach. DuPont gave us a nice methodical way of following safety, which is also simple to understand," says Steven.

"There is good buy-in now from the staff for everything we do. If we want to do something new we explain it properly, and we get the designated safety teams involved in helping formulate the strategy, which always helps get it through. The reason for doing things always goes back to our goal of zero injuries, or a low risk of anything else happening to our property or our job security."

As a testament to the success of Sonoco's adoption of workplace safety practices, the company's Bulleen plant (the largest in the region) has successfully spent over two years of operation without a recordable incident. Their Tasmanian plant has clocked up 13 years without a recordable incident.

"DuPont training has been very, very important as a preventative tool," says Steven. "Globally Sonoco's TIR (Total Incident Rate) is 1.15 (across 17,000 employees); in Australia and NZ our overall TIR is now 1.23. That's fantastic when you consider that in 1996 our TIR was about 15 which represented 40 incidents. For all of 2002 we only had four. We are rapidly bridging the gap in line with our global performance. We've also saved hundreds of thousands of dollars in Workers Compensation premiums around Australia and New Zealand, thanks to our great safety record.

"But best of all, we now have a culture where our workers don't tolerate unsafe behaviour, and take care of each other - that would have to be the best outcome."

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