

President's Message



The recent fatal accidents, involving the handling of a hazardous chemical and another one involving the fall of a suspended load, that claimed a total of five lives within the first quarter of the year has sent a very stark reminder to everyone that such fatal accidents will happen if the safety risks associated with hazardous work are not properly addressed.

Are we really on the right track to be on par with world-class WSH performance? What is the real root of the problem? Risk assessment, management commitment, worker training and competency, safe work procedures, supervision, hazard communications, emergency response and personnel protection were the recommendations made by the Workplace Safety & Health Council in its recent WSH Bulletin – WHS Alert to address these accidents. Senior management and EHS professionals know very well that these are the basic elements of the EHS management system they should have put in place to prevent such accidents. The missing links that caused the system to break down are really what senior management and EHS professionals need to identify in order to reverse the trend of serious accidents.

- Risk Management is not really new to management, EHS professionals and managers/leaders in industry, especially our process industries. The question really is, how well safety risks in industry are being managed with **systems** that are **robust** enough to prevent such tragic accidents. Senior managers have the most critical role in this and they have to internalize this belief. The extent of their belief will be demonstrated in their day-to-day behavior and action.
- The whole incident triangle or iceberg must be managed, not just the most severe (headline grabbing) accidents. An over concentration on the peak of the triangle will risk overlooking the warning signals that are present nearer the base of the triangle. Just paying attention to severe accidents will lead to episodic or random improvements at best. The overall trend will be unchanged.
- The practice of using end-of-pipe performance indicators eg. reportable accident rates should be de-emphasized. A shift to upstream indicators, eg. % completion of corrective actions within recommended time frames, should become the norm. These upstream indicators are predictors of performance. A timely arrest of an unhealthy trend will lead to systemic improvements.
- Recognition and reward systems should be revised to give due recognition to WSH performance.
- To concentrate on observable behavior and making improvements in this area before embarking on building a nebulous safety culture. The pervasiveness and permanence of behavioral changes for the better will in the end build a robust safety culture.

The list goes on. The most important thing to note is that it all starts with senior management! There is no substitute for this.