

Safety Focus Groups Task Force

Final Report: Summary & Recommendations

Submitted by:

Bob Hiltunen
Director–Auxiliary Services

Chris Maxson
Facilities Manager–Facilities Management

Submitted February 2, 2017

Executive Summary

In Fall of 2016, Bob Hiltunen (Auxiliary Services) and Chris Maxson (Facilities Management) were tasked with facilitating focus group discussions to identify the current state of “safety culture” across the units under the Office of Vice President for Administration. These units include:

- A.E. Seaman Mineral Museum
- Auxiliary Services
- Business Operations
- Facilities Management
- Human Resources
- Office of Information Services
- Public Safety and Police Services
- Risk Management

The focus group discussions focused on a wide range of safety issues, including working with or near hazardous materials, slips and falls, and ways to continuously improve safety culture in these units. This report provides a summary of safety concerns and recommendations that came out of the focus group discussions.

1.0 Background

As part of a Vice President for Administration initiative, Bob Hiltunen (Auxiliary Services) and Chris Maxson (Facilities Management) were tasked to facilitate focus groups and identify the current state of safety culture within Administration. Recommendations on ways to improve the current state were requested as part of the initiative.

1.1 Methodology

The facilitators created four cohorts of approximately ten members each, from various areas of Administration. Each group was asked a standard series of questions regarding occupational safety, their own philosophy regarding safety and safety issues in their area, and what changes they believe would improve the overall safety culture. The responses were broken down into subcategories and returned to a larger ad-hoc group that, in addition to Hiltunen and Maxson included the following employees to conduct for analysis and discussion. (See Appendix A.)

- Janet Hayden, Risk Management
- Dan Bennett, Public Safety and Police Services
- Peter Baril, Environmental Health and Safety
- Brenda Randell, Office of the Associate Vice President for Administration
- Aspen Holmes, Continuous Improvement Office (student employee)

1.2 Results

The recorded responses clearly indicate that safety is an important issue, and a wide variety of safety issues were mentioned, including working with (or near) hazardous materials, electrical safety, and slips and falls.

The focus group participants were overwhelmingly in favor of a stronger, more robust, safety culture. There was a strong interest in organized safety meetings (which some referred to as “tool box meetings”), and having an active voice in any safety culture changes or improvements.

The participants feel that they can report safety issues without fear of negative repercussions; however, the reporting process needs to be more “user friendly.” Therefore, it might prove to be a barrier to reporting minor injuries or near misses. Most of the members of the focus groups believe that the safety culture has improved over the past years, but agree that there is always room for continued improvement. It was also mentioned that front line supervisors would like more authority regarding safety issues, and that there may be a disconnect from students reporting.

The participants described their ideal safety culture as 1) where the example is set from the top down, 2) a culture that “fixes the problem, not the blame,” and, 3) a culture that does not mock anyone for bringing up safety concerns. The participants would also like to see a proactive, transparent system that captures safety statistics, involves labor in decisions, policies and processes, conducts regular meetings, and increases targeted training. The groups are interested in a culture that sets safety goals, and a culture that creates, implements, and enforces safety policies, and openly advertises and demonstrates the importance of safety.

2.0 Recommendations

The focus groups data indicate a change in the overall safety culture will be well received. In order to begin this process, the Safety Focus Group facilitators recommend the following as initial steps:

1. To create a more robust safety culture, the university must set the tone for safety, and empower all layers of management to support it. They should lead by example by supporting safety training ad continuing education, reporting of incidents and near misses, and providing resources for safety initiatives.
2. The process for data collection should be analyzed with emphasis on exploring ways to improve the current system, to make it more user friendly.
3. Create a system or process that provides regular safety meetings with department directors, front-line supervisors, and their safety liaison. In addition, create a front-line supervisor consortium among VPA which would have representation from each unit thus allowing the units to share safety information and address safety concerns across all units within the VPA.
4. Each department should regularly review and update safety policies and procedures, and information learned from near miss reporting must be considered when making updates.
5. Explore various avenues to communicate safety tips, new trends in safety, training opportunities, and ways to continue to improve our safety practices across campus. This may be accomplished in a variety of ways such as a regular feature in Tech Today, postings on a web page/website, utilization of bulletin boards, etc.

These recommendations are by no means all-inclusive, however, the analysis group believes that implementing these recommendations will be an excellent way to improve the safety culture, and address the concerns raised by the focus groups.

Appendix A

Safety Focus Group Discussion Questions and Summary Answers

Question #1: What does a safe workplace mean to you?

- Awareness
- Everyone vested in each other
- Clean, safe spaces
- Feels safe and judgment free
- Blame free
- Voices being heard

Question #2: What do you think are the main safety risks you face in your work?

- Training
- Hazard identification
- Slips, trips, and falls
- Clean spaces
- Occupational-specific injuries

Question #3: Do you feel you can report safety issues?

- Improve reporting process
- Culture improving, but not there yet
- Disconnect from student reporting near misses and incident reports
- People listen (voices being heard)

Question #4: How would you define safety culture?

- Blame free
- Yield more information from reports
- Use incidents as teachable lessons/education
- Awareness and communication
- Vested in each other's safety
- Top level support/buy-in

Question #5: If you could create a safety culture, what steps would you take to create it?

- Training and education/continuous education
- Positive reinforcement
- Awareness/Communication
- Administrative support
- Financial support
- Leading by example/demonstrating the value of safety
- Yield more data from reports

Question #6: What is the current focus within our safety culture at Michigan Tech?

- Culture on upswing
- Safety managers and liaisons
- Talking more about safety
- Ice patrol
- HR Orientation including safety
- Varies by department
- Teachable lessons from incidents
- Stick vs. carrot for completing safety training

Question #7: What is the difference between your definition of safety culture and the existing Michigan Tech Safety Culture Focus?

- Funding
- Accounting practices that involve safety
- Siloed departments
- Use incidents as teachable lessons
- Top down/lead by example
- Awareness/Communication efforts
- Clear goals

Question #8: Is there anything else that you would like to say about the safety culture at MTU?

- Safety audits
- Acknowledgement for safety improvements