

**Process Safety Assessment**  
**Spokane & Hauser Terminals & Surrounding Road Crew Territories**  
April 4 through 7, 2005

**Introduction:**

The Hauser Terminal is a new “state-of-the-art” facility that all employees interviewed said they enjoyed and appreciated. Construction was still taking place during the time of the supervisor and employee interviews.

Supervisors interviewed felt they focused a large portion of their time working through safety issues, solving problems, and communicating safety issues with craft employees. They expressed their commitment and sensitivity to providing a safety working environment. Employees had a different feeling how safety was supported by management.

Road crews interviewed at many issues they felt represented the overall negative environment they worked in on a daily basis. The “older heads” approximately 10 years and higher experienced voiced the majority of complaints about the overall operation. Younger employees had a different view but still acknowledged some of the complaints of their older co-workers. For example, the younger employees stated they like their jobs unlike their older co-workers who consistently stated they are constantly looking over their shoulders and are afraid of their jobs.

These negative perceptions have created a feeling by many of the employees in the Spokane area that it was the supervisors’ responsibility to provide a safe working environment. Worst case scenario would indicate that experienced employees have become disconnected from the safety process. A smaller number of employees further emphasized this feeling by saying they have stopped turning in safety issues. Contrastingly, in Whitefish, the majority of the employees felt responsible for their safety and the safety of their co-workers.

On a positive note, most employees interviewed stated that they thought that progress had been made over the last several months.

The BLE-T and UTU-C share the same concerns concerning their involvement in their areas safety process. The UTU-C presently is not participating in the Spokane or Kootenai Safety Committees. They feel the safety committee is not working in their best interests and is not actively working on issues they feel are important. In spite of this pervasive feeling, there were several employees interested in improving safety by looking out for one another.

## Information & Findings

### **Clear Safety Direction**

Management should clearly communicate their expectations regarding what and how they will consistently support their site's safety process. These should represent minimum standards of how certain workplace risk issues will be handled. This communication should also include what they expect employees to do to support the safety process.

The communication should describe the workplace risks that are associated with the accidents and injuries that are occurring or likely to occur in that particular territory.

Supervisors interviewed stated they work very hard communicating through Job Safety Briefings, Marathon Safety Meetings, one-on-one contacts and current postings on the safety bulletin boards. Unfortunately, employees interviewed did not have a good understanding of what these expectations and risk focus areas are. Supervisors did not have a clear strategy and plan of what they expected of their employees and how they were going to articulate and reinforce their expectations. Risk target areas and special focus work practices were not clear.

### **Empowerment**

Empowerment is the fundamental foundation plank in any successful safety process. It determines whether employees feel enable to act on their own behalf or that of their co-workers when their safety is compromised. This is the last line of defense when employees are exposed to workplace risks in all types of environmental and working conditions over a broad set of assigned duties. Used wisely, this is an extremely powerful tool. Employees choose to not engage in activities that exceed their perceived level of acceptable risk.

Most employees felt they would empower themselves not perform any task they felt compromised their safety. However, they said they constantly worry about being challenged by supervisors and dispatchers when and if they empower themselves that could lead to insubordination. Their comments go back to their feeling of being afraid for their jobs. This single feeling will counter enable employees to act. They will find a way to push through risk situations that should be mitigated before attempting to finish the work task. There is no escaping the relationship of workplace risk and the production of accidents and injuries. Simply stated; the lower the risk the lower the likelihood of the accident or injury sequence taking place. Systematic risk reduction is the only way to achieve sustainable accident and injury experience.

## **Confidence in the Site Safety Process**

This is an issue for both the terminal and road employees. Supervisors have a much higher confidence in the safety process. They feel through the operations testing program, the safety committee and the variety of safety communications that progress is being made.

Craft employees unfortunately don't share this feeling. In effect most employees have a very low confidence in the safety process. First, most employees think the safety process revolves around the unsafe conditions correction process. Second, human factors risk is not discussed. Discussions stop when it is brought into the conversation. As, the majority of risk exposure comes from human factors this is a huge issue. We are leaving a large portion of our risk identification and elimination process on the table.

Trust, credibility and respect are also casualties in our discussions. When asked to rate the level of trust, credibility and respect from 1 to 10 where 10 are the highest rating employees consistently indicate a rate in the 1 to 2 range. Overall morale is also described in the same manner. This may explain why supervisors are communicating frequent safety messages but they are being filtered and their impact is diminished.

## **Employee Participation in the Safety Process**

As described above the UTU-C is not actively participating in the safety committee process. This is a significant gap that must be remedied to optimize our efforts in preventing accidents and injuries. The current safety committee focusing on only environmental and physical plant issues is also a situation that limits our safety efforts and success.

A larger issue may be a general disconnect by many of the employees interviewed with the sites safety process. Employees further stated that their comments represented their co-workers feelings as well. This disconnect can lead to employees not turning in safety issues, practicing empowerment, or intervening with their co-workers when they see them about to be exposed to an at-risk work situation. As stated earlier, just working through or around the risk situation and "taking their chances".

## **Safety Goals and Objectives**

Supervisors interviewed had a good understanding of the division safety goals and objectives. Safety goals and objectives have been and continue to be part of our discussion topics.

Very few employees interviewed had an understanding of our safety goals and objectives. Not only are these goals and objectives reinforced through verbal communication they are posted on the safety bulletin board for all employees to see.

## **Unsafe Conditions (Environmental and Physical Plant Conditions)**

The safety committee at Spokane is focusing on only environmental and physical plant conditions. It is rare to discuss human factors issues except for an occasional work rule challenge.

Employee interviews and discussions further reinforced this point. The following is a short list of issues repeatedly brought forward by terminal and road employees:

- Overall condition of SD 40 locomotives
  - Excessive noise levels
  - General run down conditions of units
  - Leaks in cab compartment when raining
  - Other units in consist available but not switched as lead unit
- Paper Deadheads
- Local officials approve claims but Fort Worth denies claim
- Must wait on main line after 10 to 12 hour trip to secure train until relieved
- Pay issue- higher trip rates- not back pay- still haven't implemented
- Can't get a live voice when calling crew management

As you can see from the above list, many of the complaints are related to indirect safety issues. These issues and other similar issues frame the safety "head-set" of the employees interviewed.

Our discussions with supervisors and review of SIRP logs indicate that safety issues are being consistently completed and communicated to the initiators. The older experienced employees perceptions indicate that sporadic communication to no communication takes place when they turn in a safety issue. The younger employees feel that issues are consistently completed and communicated.

There needs to be a general shift to a balanced risk identification and elimination approach.

## **Human Factors**

Human factors were not discussed with the exception of a local chairman discussing the possibilities and merits of a mentorship program and a suggestion of building a stub track where employees could practice lining switches, tying hand brakes, coupling and uncoupling air hoses and climbing.

Human Factors is a critical component of a viable safety process. It offers balance to our safety process but is the most difficult to capture.

## **Workplace Risk Analysis**

Supervisors interviewed have not received training in modern problem-solving techniques and still gravitate to one cause analysis. Often the cause that is discussed is miss-identified and is only a symptom of something more upstream in the management process.

Employees interviewed stated they understood the value of being able to analyze accidents and injuries but were unsure how to go about it. They gravitate to a one cause approach that invariably points to one of a variety of conditions that explains to some degree the “what” but not the “why” it occurred.

## **Risk Solutions**

Without a viable problem-solving process it becomes difficult to identify reasons why a particular accident or injury continues to occur.

The main focus of risk identification and elimination focuses on environmental and physical plant risks. When focusing on only “things” we pass over those upstream causes that are actually producing accident and injuries.

## **Measurement for Results**

Measurement of accident and injury experience focuses on statistics. Accidents and injury statistics are used to brief work crew and is “sliced and diced” in many different ways to offer clarity.

There is no evidence of a measurement process that primarily focuses on occupational safety issues that either relate to the identification or measurement of solutions to eliminate human factor risks. Operations Testing Program offers the only indication of human factors risks and follow-up measurement.

## **Safety Communication**

Safety communication consisted of Job Safety Briefings, Marathon Safety Meetings, Supervisor Contact Meetings and Safety Bulletin Boards.

Unfortunately, employees interviewed did not have a good understanding of what these expectations and risk focus areas are. At this point it was difficult to detail what was being done about those risk areas or how the risk solutions were working.

The Job Safety Briefings that were conducted on a daily basis with emphasis on both job planning and risk within the work process. The briefings began and ended on a positive note by design. Road crews brief themselves for the most part.

Marathon safety meetings are conducted monthly with an emphasis on participation. This can be trying at times do to the volume of issues expressed. Overall, the Marathon meetings are well done and have a positive impact.

One-on-one contacts is a challenge for trainmasters who attempt to talk to as many people as possible in the terminal locations but contacts are competing with administrative expectations that must be accomplished. Several of the road crews noted the longest gaps between one supervisor to another.

The safety bulletin boards were current and in orderly condition. They offered much useful safety related information. They contained safety statistics to track division progress, rules explanations, and other pertinent information.

### **Understanding of the Closed-Loop Safety Process**

The “Closed-Loop” Safety Process is designed to identify all types of workplace risks that supervisors and employees would be exposed to in their normal assigned duties. It also includes analysis of workplace risks and the selection of appropriate solutions to either eliminate or reduce those risks so they do not produce accidents or injuries.

In Spokane and the surrounding areas, the Closed-Loop Safety Process is not being used in a manner that optimizes accident and injury prevention. Environmental and physical plant risks were identified through the SIRP. The only human factors risk identification came from supervisor based Operations Testing that focused primarily on GCOR based rules. As human factors risk comprises the vast majority of risk producing accidents and injuries our approach does not go far enough to capture daily human factors risk exposure and likelihood for the accident or injury taking place. Essentially, we have to know about it before we can analyze and select appropriate solutions to mitigate its negative impact on our prevention efforts.

### **Recognition**

Recognition is composed of safety lunches and verbal recognition through Job Safety Briefings. Job Safety Briefings are conducted for switch crews only.

Supervisors contact craft employees for both Operations Testing failures and successes. Employees associated with rules failures are contacted directly by the observing supervisor at the time of the observation. Successes may be contacted immediately but are follow-up with a letter to reinforce the successful job performance. Employees with less than 10 years of experience contend that they are contacted after Operations Testing while employees with more than 10 years experience say they are rarely contacted after testing.

## **Safety Responsibility**

There was a pervasive feeling by most employees interviewed that over time they have shifted responsibility for safety from themselves to their supervisors. The older employees were extremely vocal about their supervisors being responsible for maintaining a safe working environment. When this shift takes place, employees distance themselves from the safety process and are much less apt to empower themselves or identify and turn in safety issues.

Employees feel that getting the job done for the customers is of paramount importance and was implied that it comes before their personal safety. Several examples were given that show a disconnect between going above and beyond getting trains over the road and having huge displeasure when a supervisor schedules a formal investigation when an injury results from this expeditious movement.

## **Shared Safety Activities**

Supervisors perform a variety of safety activities that they feel have an effect on their employees safety. Local supervisors, site safety team members, union leadership and craft employees do not have a coordinated array of safety activities that support a common safety process.

Each group should have certain safety activities they should perform to optimize workplace risk identification and elimination. Current activities center on the SIRP process, Operations Testing, Job Safety Briefings, Marathon Meetings, and supervisor safety contacts.

## **Recommendations:**

### **Clear and Common Direction in Safety**

The Information & Findings section of this assessment defines where we are. It describes current strengths and gaps in our safety process. The site leader and their leadership team need to have a clear vision of where the team is going in the future. Design and develop a destination that describes something better for both supervisors and employees. For our purposes, the destination could be:

1. "Injury and accident free performance over a certain period.
2. An enabled work force that takes responsibility for working safely and actively intervenes when they see a co-worker involved in a heightened risk situation
3. Full use of empowerment when a work situation exceeds acceptable risk.
4. Immediate supervisor contact when an unsafe situation is identified and results in protection and correction of the safety issue.
5. A balanced safety process that involves the identification and elimination of both physical plant and human factors risks.

Once the plan or vision is created then it needs to be effectively communicated and reinforced to all team members. The journey in effect becomes more important than the destination. As team members accept and become committed to “what becomes” our common vision the team leader constantly instills energy into the process to keep all team members motivated to continue the journey.

In the Spokane Area both the terminal and road crews share many common overlaps and could be considered one work group. A common safety vision/plan would suit both operation requirements. The vision/plan could include:

1. The Terminal Superintendent and Superintendent Operations should schedule a meeting and design a “stawman” safety vision/plan. The emphasis should be on something short, simple and to-the-point.
2. Schedule a series of meetings with direct reports and supervisors so they can have input so buy-in takes place. Be very clear and to the point. Allow full participation and input but stand firm on our convictions to create an accident and injury free work environment.
3. Schedule a meeting with the union leadership to give them an opportunity to weigh in. Remember, this is a safety leadership meeting that is focusing on where we want to be in the future and not a meeting to define problems that tell where we currently are. Everyone must agree this safety vision/plan makes good sense. This meeting must be lead by both the Terminal Superintendent and Superintendent Operations. Present your “safety vision/plan in progress as a joint front. Be clear and concise but firm.
4. Then take it to the employees through a series of marathon safety meetings. Explain the plan clearly using simple examples that relate to their work situations. Explain how empowerment works. What they should do and what you will do consistently if they empower themselves. Explain how Operations Testing and SIRP will work and what your role will be. This element is crucial for our success. Present the safety plan from a unified front using supervisors and union leadership. Solidarity is vital. After all, our safety vision/plan should be what we all feel is important. After these meetings every supervisor and employee should have a clear understanding of what our team’s safety focus will be in the Spokane Area.
5. Next, develop a reinforcing communication plan that should include:
  - a. Job Safety Briefing “vision/plan boosters” to be used weekly to highlight common safety focus areas
  - b. Monthly marathon meetings including brief summary of safety focus areas
  - c. Safety Bulletin Board safety vision/plan summaries including goals and objectives
  - d. Supervisor and union leadership safety contacts where our mutual vision/plan elements are reinforced
  - e. Banners and awareness projects to keep folding in our continued commitment to our joint safety vision/plan. Get it out there and keep it out there.

6. Use the Safety Committee as a platform to support, reinforce and communicate progress on our journey to achieving our safety vision/plan

Our success is going to be based on our willingness and discipline to be consistent in our application of those key concepts detailed in our safety vision/plan. Inconsistency will kill our vision so all team members must be completely sure they are willing to live up to the components of our mutually agreed to plan.

### **Empowerment and Responsibility for Safety**

Empowerment and personal responsibility for safety are two important evidences of success when determining if the journey to our mutual safety vision/plan is proceeding in an effective manner. Both concepts are intrinsic and must be decided with each and every employee. Without employees freely empowering themselves and taking responsibility for their personal safety and the safety of their co-workers we will not have an enabled work force. Without these fundamental foundation planks in our safety process we will not be able to work as an effective safety team.

Both concepts must be conspicuously featured in our safety vision/plan and constantly reinforced by supervision and union leadership. Again, consistency in application is vital to our success.

### **Safety Issue Resolution Process**

The current SIRP is working with some exceptions. In a broad perspective discussing this issue with supervisors and employees the success or failure of the SIRP is determined primarily on having available funding to correct the identified issues. Discussion of budget responsibility or general issue funding should be discussed outside the safety committee so as not to confuse an already volatile feeling that safety is a money issue.

Safety Issue Resolution is a team effort. When employees identify safety issue they should immediately protect the issue and then communicate it to supervision. Once received the safety issue is logged and corrected.

A key piece of our communication process must explain how this process works. The SIRP is not an open-ended and unlimited expenditure process where every suggestion on its own merits will be corrected. If we approached SIRP from that perspective we would soon be out of business. All businesses have limitations and constraints. Eliminating risk where we can but always trying to reduce it to the lowest levels possible is the key. Correcting safety issues using good judgment is our goal. This approach will dispel much of the negative perceptions surrounding the SIRP.

## **Site Safety Team Accident & Injury Prevention Process**

The Spokane site safety team does not have UTU participation. The UTU has backed out of participating in any type of organized safety activity. The “Safety Leadership” recommendation includes a process where the UTU can reestablish participation in the safety process through direct input and decision making in how the safety process should be designed to meet their individual needs.

The Spokane Safety Committee is focusing on physical plant issues. The next natural step is to become involved in a complete range of “Closed-Loop” Safety Process activities.

Risk-based safety training should be scheduled for the site safety team to provide them the skills to identify all types of workplace risk including human factors. Also they need training to analyze those risks and determine the most effective course of action to eliminate or reduce those risks. They need to know how to develop an implementation plan and execute it. Further, instruction on how to measure for results. The site team should know if their applied risk solutions are getting the results that they expected. And, finally, the best methods to provide risk performance feedback to all affected employees.

Training can be conducted within a site team meeting day and prepare them to balance all types of risk in their accident and injury prevention efforts.

### **Recognition**

Presently, the Spokane Area safety process only recognizes long standing injury-free work performance.

In a safety process that focuses on all types of workplace risk human factors risk reductions should be recognized as well.

As risk information is developed by the site safety team, risk targets are established to provide performance goals that the group feels is acceptable. When risk solutions are selected and implemented and risk targets are achieved then recognition should be awarded to both supervisors and employees.

The type and frequency of recognition will be decided by the site safety team and is part of the roles and responsibilities of the balanced site team. Local supervisors are part to the site teams.

### **Shared Safety Activities**

Shared Safety activities will be expanded as site teams are trained and given activities in risk identification, analysis, risk solutions, implementation, measurement, employee feedback and recognition.

The end product of the recommendations is a mutually agreed to safety vision/plan that meets supervisor's and craft employee's individual needs. To achieve our vision/plan, each group has special safety activities that they perform. The challenge becomes being consistent and true to our original commitments. Employees will listen to our words but will judge us by our actions.