

# Safety Training:

## Important for Your Employees and Your Customers

*Distributors need to ensure the safety of their employees as well as their customers.*

By William Atkinson

While most companies only have a responsibility to train their own employees in safety practices and procedures, distributors often also have a responsibility to train employees in their customer organizations on safety, primarily as it relates to the equipment that they sell to those customers.

### EMPLOYEE SAFETY TRAINING

Rudy Cuevas became the corporate safety administrator at Associated Material Handling (Addison, Ill.) in 2007. "By 2009, we had completed a lot of safety training for our employees, including OSHA training," he states. "However, we wanted to provide more training to help focus on specific issues." As a result, Associated worked with its insurance company to conduct research to identify the types of accidents and injuries that its employees had been experiencing. It found that the majority were either back injuries or hand injuries.

Associated then brought some-



one in from the insurance company for a "Safety Saturday" to do training programs on back safety and safe lifting. "In fact, the insurance company looked at our claims in detail and were able to incorporate some unique information into the training related to the specific claims we had," Cuevas explains. That is, it wasn't just a generic training program on back and lifting safety. It was targeted specifically to incidents that had occurred at Associated.

"That has been one of the most beneficial classes we have held, in that we have been able to reduce the number of back injuries over the last couple of years," he points out.

Wisconsin Lift Truck (Brookfield, Wis.) has several different safety programs for its people. Everything begins with a safety orientation, which all employees attend.

"All of our mechanics also go through a mechanic safety orientation in addition to the basic safety orientation," reports David Hermann, safety director. Everyone also goes through forklift safety and aerial safety. In addition, since the company employs CDL truck drivers, these drivers go through hazmat training, cargo securement and all of the other DOT-related training.

And training at Wisconsin Lift Truck can be even more specialized. "We just hired someone who will be changing tires on lift trucks, so we have a special safety training for that," adds Hermann.

## CUSTOMER SAFETY TRAINING

Associated provides safety training to its customers on the Raymond equipment that it sells. The program is called "Safety on the Move."

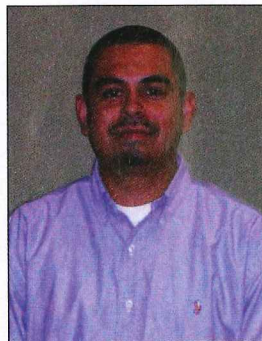
"We provide basic operator training classes, where we go to the customer site and train their operators – both in a classroom setting and a hands-on setting," notes Cuevas. "We also provide 'train the trainer' classes, where we train a selected number of employees or supervisors at a customer location in the Safety on the Move program, and then they can train the other employees."

For Wisconsin Lift Truck, the two biggest areas for customer safety training are OSHA-compliant forklift safety and aerial safety training. However, the company also offers a class for customers on fall protection. In addition, the company sells a product called the Trackmobile, which is a truck that can drive on rails, for moving train cars around. "We provide safety training for this, too," adds Hermann.

## SAFETY STRATEGIES

One thing that Cuevas has found very important in the success of safety training is to get everyone involved. "Even though I am the safety manager, I can't do everything myself," he explains. "When employees have the opportunity to be involved, they are more likely to adopt the safety culture because they really believe in it, not just because it is required by OSHA."

When Hermann or someone else from Wisconsin Lift Truck is involved in safety training, they make it very clear in every class that the most im-



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portant part of the class is the person sitting there. "We emphasize that the reason we have safety rules and training is because we want to protect people," he explains. "This helps them become motivated to protect themselves." In other words, part of the training provides specific technical information on how they can protect themselves. However, the overall theme is to make sure they also understand their individual responsibility to protect themselves.

"We emphasize the importance of employees bringing up safety concerns to their supervisors or managers," continues Hermann. "A lot of times, supervisors and managers don't see the same things that the employees do. Then, a dialog needs to take place to make sure that those concerns are addressed and resolved."

The company also emphasizes to supervisors and managers that their role is not to be a "safety cop," but rather to be more of a friend helping another person. "They aren't enforcing rules," Hermann observes, "they are looking out for people."

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