

## Safety Incentive Programmes

It was just a decade ago that workplace safety incentive programmes were new on the scene. Today, they are a commonplace approach used by small and large companies to improve safety and reduce costs associated with workplace injuries and work-related ill health. Since their adoption, believers of safety incentive programmes have come to find that they are an important element in any health and safety programme, but sceptics point to a variety of pitfalls that may actually decrease job safety.

The problem arises when companies implement a programme in which tangible awards are provided based solely on employees achieving a specified number of days free from accidents and injuries that result in lost time. This kind of approach is widely believed to lead to under-reporting of injuries, which can cause your organisation to be unaware of—and unable to fix—potentially dangerous situations in the workplace.

Fortunately, behaviour-based programmes are significantly more effective in actually changing employee behaviours and in firmly implanting a safety-minded culture in your organisation. Rather than just ‘working X days without a lost-time injury’, behaviour-based safety incentive programmes provide incentives for employees to make safety suggestions, participate in meetings or audits and implement job improvements. By getting employees involved in the process of creating a safe work environment, they will be more likely to focus on the total outcome rather than just the reward.

### Your Safety Incentive Programme

When safety incentive programmes are implemented improperly, they run the risk of becoming:

- **Ineffective:** Employees ultimately lose interest, while employers find them too time-consuming and costly to keep up.
- **Expected:** Employees eventually expect to receive the incentive regardless of the outcome.
- **Routine:** When expectations and rewards are the same year after year, employees will lose interest and the programme will run out of steam.

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- **Punitive:** Employees may become ‘punitive’ towards one another, particularly when group rewards are used. If one person is responsible for the loss of a group reward, that individual may become the target of negative behaviour or resentment by other employees.
- **Irrelevant:** Employees may not see the relevance of the programmes, even from the beginning. After all, aren’t they supposed to be safe as part of their job requirements?

Conversely, when safety incentive programmes are part of an overall safety-minded culture and a well-planned and administered safety programme, the use of incentives can reduce unsafe acts and change employee behaviours. Safety incentive programmes should never be a substitute for a good job design but should be used in organisations that have already been

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Provided by In2Matrix

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successful in eliminating unsafe conditions and hazards.

When employers recruit safety-conscious workers, involve top and middle management in safety performance and clearly link awards and incentives to specific performance measures, a safety incentive programme can be a success.

## Programme Dos

- DO: Understand the importance of recognition rather than reward. Companies that train and encourage leaders to recognise safe behaviour and positive outcomes have excellent safety cultures. Employee recognition is essential to building safety awareness and should be used as a significant way of promoting the programme on a continual basis. Consider the value of recognition in newsletters and awards ceremonies, surprise pizza parties and even a simple pat on the back. This type of recognition from superiors is often seen as more personal and meaningful than tangible rewards. Then, use those other rewards as icing on the cake.
- DO: Use constant repetition and consistently promote the programme. Take your cues from marketing, where the most essential thing to delivering a message is frequency and consistency.
- DO: Get management support and buy-in. Every manager from supervisors to the CEO must be committed to, and participate in, the programme. Employees will never buy into a programme if they see that management hasn't.
- DO: Commit appropriate time and money to the programme. The appropriate budget and time commitment will go a long way towards implementing and maintaining a successful programme.
- DO: Make safety a core value for your organisation. It is as important to long-term success as production and profits. Discussion of safety issues should be part of every meeting.

- DO: Involve employees in the process. Have them participate in committees, inspections, investigations and making suggestions.
- DO: Set high expectations, state them clearly and often, and provide employees with the proper resources and equipment to meet them.
- DO: Reward everyone and reward often. While you are spending money on and rewarding the people who are already safe, what are you doing to change the behaviour of those who aren't? Be sure that every employee has an equal chance at rewards. If you are using long-term processes or points-based programmes that build towards rewards, send regular updates so employees know where they stand. With any programme, provide routine feedback and continuously connect successful behaviour changes to the reward.
- DO: Provide rewards that are genuine, meaningful, important and worth achieving. Sometimes a pat on the back is worth more than cash.

## Programme Don'ts

- DON'T: Focus on just the reward. Instead, consistently educate and encourage the safety-conscious behaviour that will lead to the desired outcome.
- DON'T: Focus on injury reports, which are lagging indicators. Programmes that are based solely on reducing the number of reported injuries can discourage timely and accurate reporting. Instead, implement strong injury reporting policies and accident investigation procedures alongside a programme that encourages safety-conscious behaviours and makes safety top of mind for all employees.
- DON'T: Let the safety incentive programme stand alone or be a substitute for a full safety programme. Safety incentive programmes must be used alongside safety meetings, training sessions and employee suggestion programmes in order to help build safety awareness and long-term enthusiasm for the programme. Any company

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considering a safety incentive programme should already have in place a comprehensive safety programme that includes return-to-work light duty programmes, thorough accident investigation procedures and employee-driven safety committees.

- **DON'T:** Make it complicated. Safety incentive plans should be simple and unambiguous. Start with a big kick-off during which expectations are clearly communicated, and then continue to regularly communicate these expectations. Awards and incentives should be clearly and quickly linked to specific performance measures.
- **DON'T:** Attempt to take a programme 'off the shelf' and plug it into your organisation. Certain types of incentive programmes simply may not work in your organisation, and they might even become a disincentive to report injuries. Instead, keeping in mind your long-term goal of reducing accidents and injuries and keeping workplace accident claims in check, use a process-based approach that fits your organisation's characteristics and will help employees to reach the end goal. In order to be effective, your programme must strike a balance between reducing injuries and encouraging safety-conscious activities.
- **DON'T:** Expect the programme to run itself, or it will run out of steam. Get employees involved by setting up safety committees comprised of employees. Be sure they have an appropriate budget and resources to run the programme for the long term.
- **DON'T:** Use contests or group rewards that will result in negative peer pressure. Group rewards will only work in organisations where teamwork and cooperation are already part of the culture.

## Rewards that Work

What about gifts and prizes? Is cash ever an acceptable reward? Most experts agree that cash bonuses are acceptable for truly outstanding safety performance,

but many warn that cash – while seemingly the most valuable prize an employee could receive – is simply not special enough. Rewards should be symbolic, meaningful and a remembrance of the job well done. Many companies use clothing, housewares or outdoor equipment imprinted with company safety slogans or logos. Offering extra holiday days and food or parties are also popular with employees and are easy to implement.

## We're Your Safety Partner

Above all, remember that safety incentive programmes should not be about paying people off, but about recognition and motivation for making safety a top priority every day.

In2Matrix has a host of tools and resources to help you take your safety programme to the next level. Contact us today to learn more about how we can help support your safety culture to control exposures.