

How to Use Your OSH Management System to Achieve Awards and Recognitions – in Two Steps

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In addition to compliance with the law, as well as increased effectiveness and efficiency, a well-designed occupational safety and health (OSH) management system (MS) will easily generate the types of documents and other “tangible evidences” necessary for a strong awards application package, such as the coveted OSHA’s Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) “Star” and “Merit” recognitions, and the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA). I’ll show you how, and why, in two steps.

Step 1 — Develop, implement and utilize a well-designed OSH management system — which includes planning, training, self-inspections and review programs — for a sustained period of time.

In the past three issues of *Journal of System Safety*, I have shared with readers the three most important components of a highly effective OSH MS. They include:

- **Standards-based:** i.e., they are grounded *solely* on the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations and other official statutory requirements.
- **Multi-programmed and “Quality” driven:** i.e., they are built on the *Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA)* cycle for “continuous improvement” (also known as the “quality” model) and manage multiple OSH programs, including planning, training, inspection and review, with this approach.
- **Technologically advanced:** i.e., they are powered with relational database management technology (RDMT) or equivalent technology, integrating compliance management data within and between each program, thereby eliminating redundant data and work efforts.

The most efficient and effective OSH MS incorporate three elements: *legal* standards, *multiple* programs and *advanced* technologies. (Note: To learn more about, and see examples of, OSH MS employing these three components, visit: www.relationalEHS.com.)

The formula, then, for the most effective and efficient OSH MS is this:

Official standards and regulations, divided by and used within the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle of “continuous improvement,” multiplied with relational database management technology, results in an effective and efficient occupational safety and health management system, or equivalent technology; or,

$$\left(\frac{\text{Standards}}{\text{PDCA}} \right) * \text{technology} = \text{OSH MS}^2$$

A “systems” approach, like the one outlined here and summarized in this formula, is encouraged by OSHA and can be defined as:

A system is an established arrangement of components that work together to attain a certain objective, in this case to prevent injuries and illnesses in the workplace. Within a system, all parts are interconnected and affect each other... All elements of a safety and health system are interrelated. All pieces are related to all other pieces. A flaw in one piece will probably impact all the other pieces, and therefore the system as a whole. [Ref. 1]

Of course, OSHA does not require that your systems employ RDMT or other electronic-based technology. Whether your systems are paper-based or electronic is not what’s most important. What *is* important is that you have systems in place, and that those systems are “adapted to meet each workplace’s particular characteristics... Ultimately, the system’s effectiveness in *practice* is what is important” [Ref. 2].

Systems powered with relational database management technology (RDMT), however, and as presented in this and in the previous issue of *Journal of System Safety*, *significantly* increase their efficiencies and effectiveness. This is because RDMT allows information managed within each “major element” of the system to be shared *relationally* within and between the other elements. This powerful combination of technology and “continuous improvement” is how the best systems unleash the power of shared data; it is what makes these systems unique, and it is what will move your OSH programs forward quickly and efficiently.

What’s more, the best systems are employed at *all* organizational levels and by a variety of stakeholders — e.g., executives, managers, trainers, inspectors, supervisors and front-line workers. RDMT significantly facilitates this challenging task as well.

Without the aid of RDMT, implementation of so many “moving parts” (i.e., programs and requirements) with so many stakeholders (i.e., end users) is difficult. Consequently, and all too often, many companies’ OSH

programs and management systems remain in some manager's three-ringed binder, sitting on top of his or her bookshelf.

Step 2 — Use your well-designed OSH MS to generate the types of documentation required for a strong awards application package.

Now that you have developed, implemented and consistently used a well-designed OSH MS — one that includes the three essential elements described here and in the three previous issues of *Journal of System Safety* — you are ready to prepare a strong awards and recognitions application package.

These types of systems make great stepping stones to achieving various Federal recognitions and honors, such as OSHA's coveted Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) "Star" and "Merit" recognitions and the Malcolm Baldrige "National Quality Award," sponsored by the U.S. Commerce Department's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and administered by the American Society for Quality (ASQ). Simply, a well-designed OSH MS should be capable of generating the types of documents and other "tangible evidences" necessary for a strong awards application package.

What follows are some excerpts from the OSHA and Malcolm Baldrige awards application instructions with regard to *systems* and *documentations*, in their words, with *emphasis* mine. (Be sure to visit their respective websites for complete application instructions; see References.)

An excerpt from the OSHA "VPP Application Instructions for the Site-Based Way to Participate" [Ref. 3]

There is some *paperwork* required in the application process, but we encourage you to use as much *existing* material as possible...

To enable OSHA to determine initial and continued VPP approval, you will maintain and make available for OSHA review the following information:

- Your *written* safety and health management system...
- All *documentation* enumerated under Section VI.B.6.d of the January 9, 2009 VPP Federal Register Notice...
- Describe your *written* safety and health management system, including safety and health policies, procedures, systems and programs...
- For the purposes of VPP, a method of preventing employee fatalities, injuries and illnesses through the ongoing planning, implementation, integration,

and control of four *interdependent elements*: Management Leadership and Employee Involvement; Worksite Analysis; Hazard Prevention and Control; and Safety and Health Training...

- Please provide a list/index for any *supporting documentation* you choose to attach to the *written* description of the program...
 - Management Leadership and Employee Involvement
 - Worksite Analysis
 - Hazard Prevention and Control
 - Safety and Health Training
 - Injury and Illness Performance

An excerpt from the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) Application Instructions [Ref. 4]

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) is presented annually by the President of the United States to organizations that demonstrate quality and performance excellence...

Established by Congress in 1987 for manufacturers, service businesses and small businesses, the Baldrige Award was designed to raise awareness of quality management and recognize U.S. companies that have implemented successful quality-management systems...

Recipients are selected based on *achievement and improvement* in seven areas, known as the **Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence**:

- **Leadership:** How upper management leads the organization, and how the organization leads within the community.
- **Strategic planning:** How the organization establishes and plans to implement strategic directions.
- **Customer and market focus:** How the organization builds and maintains strong, lasting relationships with customers.
- **Measurement, analysis and knowledge management:** How the organization uses data to support key processes and manage performance.
- **Human resource focus:** How the organization empowers and involves its workforce.
- **Process management:** How the organization designs, manages and improves key processes.
- **Business/organizational performance results:** How the organization performs in terms of customer satisfaction, finances, human resources, supplier and partner performance, operations, governance and social responsibility, and how the organization compares to its competitors.

Conclusion

There are similarities and patterns seen in these types of award application instructions:

- Companies should implement and sustain successful *quality*-management systems, using a *systems*-approach.
- Reviewers don't look for a single correct way to meet award requirements; they want to see a *system* that works for your company.
- Reviewers allow for some creativity and alternatives to current eligibility and performance requirements.

With regard to the last bullet point, OSHA's VPP program allows for two types of *alternative* systems approaches — their "Demonstration Program" and their "Star Program." If a Demonstration Program is judged successful, "its alternative ways to achieve safety and health excellence may lead to changes in VPP criteria." Similarly, a Star Program is "designed for participants whose safety and health management systems operate in a highly effective, self-sufficient manner and meet all VPP requirements" [Ref. 3].

Note: The types of systems I've recommended in my articles — see above and the three previous issues of *Journal of System Safety* — are certainly "creative" and "alternative" approaches, albeit they are also *proven* approaches.

References

1. Occupational Safety & Health Administration. *Overview of System Components from Safety & Health Management Systems eTools*, accessed April 8, 2013, <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/safety-health/components.html>.
2. Occupational Safety & Health Administration. *Voluntary Safety & Health Program Management Guidelines*, accessed April 8, 2013, http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_General_Facts/vol_safetyhealth_mngt_.pdf
3. Occupational Safety & Health Administration. *VPP Application Instructions for the Site-Based Way to Participate*, accessed April 8, 2013, http://www.osha.gov/dcsp/vpp/application_sitebased.html.
4. American Society for Quality. *Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA)*, accessed April 8, 2013, <http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/malcolm-baldrige-award/overview/overview.html>.
5. Occupational Safety & Health Administration. OSH Act of 1970, accessed June 1, 2015, https://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=OSHACT&p_id=3359

If all of this seems a bit much (and, frankly, it is), then your company might want to consider obtaining an OSH MS, such as the Relational ESH MS, where these types of documentation and "tangible evidences" are already in place, and where they become byproducts of using the system on a regular (i.e., daily or weekly) basis.

The bottom line is this: In addition to awards and recognitions, a well-designed OSH MS built on the three components described in this article (i.e., legal standards, PDCA and RDMT) will significantly help top management, front-line supervisors and all workers manage their efforts to furnish to each employee "work and places of work which are increasingly free from recognized hazards to safety and health" [Ref. 5].

About the Author

David A. Wise holds a MS in OSH/EM from Columbia Southern University and an undergraduate degree in health care management from the Community College of the Air Force. He is the author and developer of The Relational ESH™ Management System, a relational database management system used by general industries to manage environmental, health and safety compliance requirements. For more information about him and the information systems he shares with general industries, visit his LinkedIn profile at www.linkedin.com. ●