

## New safety plan challenges employees

*“Our personal accountability in how we do our jobs safely should overshadow everything else . . .”*

*—Howard Schumacher*

Western’s safety community has been challenged by Administrator **Mike Hacskaylo** to improve the agency’s safety culture. In response, senior and safety managers have proposed a new Safety Action Plan that focuses on issues they believe are critical to its success: maintaining management support, integrating safety into all processes and procedures, communicating safety responsibilities and expectations and holding employees accountable for safe work behavior.

CSO’s Safety and Security Manager **Terry Dembrowski**, along with senior and safety managers from each region, are determined to ensure the new action plan is a top priority throughout Western. “We want to place emphasis on, and devote attention to, our safety program so that we prevent the next accident,” Dembrowski said. “This plan will give the Safety offices a chance to focus on issues that are most important to improving our safety culture.”

What does “safety culture” mean?

Historically, Western has been able to demonstrate that it has an exemplary safety program, with other utilities routinely asking for copies of our agency’s manuals and programs to incorporate into their programs. Although Transformation and utility deregulation issues may be seen by some as shifting emphasis away from safety in recent years, safety remains a top priority within Western.

Western annually reviews its safety program to determine if procedural improvements can make jobs safer. By accepted methods of measurement, Western is far below industry rates for illnesses and injuries. On paper, Western has one of the best programs around, Dembrowski noted.

So what is the problem? Why does Western continue to experience accidents and incidents that, upon analysis, identify unsafe behavior as the main contributing factor in the majority of preventable accidents that result in injuries and property damage? Are employees missing something

in the transition from words to acceptable actions? Are mixed messages being sent to employees in this time of cost containment, downsizing and doing more with less?

According to senior and safety managers, Western can do better, and they challenge all employees to elevate their standard of behavior to ensure safety.

Highlights of the new Safety Action Plan include:

- **Maintaining support from all levels of management:** A significant factor in reaching an improved safety culture is management’s visible support. Also modeling, rewarding safe behavior, correcting unsafe behaviors, active



listening and empowering employees are important elements. Managers must “walk the talk” by working safely as well as showing employees they care about worker safety, too.

- **Integrating safety into processes and procedures:** Safety is an essential element of everyday operations—not a separate activity. Managers, supervisors and employees must be involved in making day-to-day health- and safety-related activities and decisions. Preventive, rather than reactive, behavior-based measures must be integrated into the workplace.
- **Communicating safety responsibilities and expectations:** Supervisors must lead by example and be account-

able and responsible for unsafe acts and conditions that occur under their direction. It is imperative that everyone, through a variety of communication efforts (e-mail, newsletters, meetings, etc.) understands his or her safety responsibilities and expectations.

- **Holding employees accountable for work behavior:** Personal accountability of every employee is critical. Employees must understand that they are responsible and accountable for their actions as they affect safety. The message should be loud and clear there will be no tolerance for unsafe work practices or rule violations by employees, supervisors or managers.

## *Regional safety managers voice support for new plan*

**Ken Schriener**, Safety, Security and Occupational Health Manager, Desert Southwest Region

“With all the changes in Western and the utility industry recently, we somewhat lost our focus on safety. The last few accidents we’ve experienced showed our employees were complacent. The barriers to prevent an accident were in place, just not observed. Our new Safety Action Plan will get us back to protecting our most valuable and precious resource—our employees.”

**Bill Marsh**, Safety and Security Manager, Rocky Mountain Region

“The Safety Action Plan has been used in the Rocky Mountain Region as a good ‘checklist’ to see how we compare with our current practices and policies to achieve a safety culture that nurtures safety concepts. Transformation has caused some inconsistencies lately, but these were easily recognized with the new safety plan. Safety and regional management have taken actions to correct deficiencies.”

**Howard Schumacher**, Safety and Security Manager, Sierra Nevada Region

“When I was in school and did not do my homework, both my teacher and my mom made me pay tough consequences. In college, pinochle was more important one semester than attending class and I paid the price with a lowered grade point average. In the military, if I failed, a lot of people paid the price. On the job, when I did not use a chain saw properly, I injured my arm.

“My point is—you must be held accountable for your actions. Western has a superlative safety program. Our personal accountability in how we do our jobs safely should overshadow everything else—from the administrator all the way through the chain to everyone else.”

**Randy Fettig**, Occupational Health, Safety and Security Manager, Upper Great Plains Region

“I appreciate the Administrator’s challenge to improve our agency’s safety culture. Although the ‘sky isn’t falling,’ I agree with the other safety managers that we are observing indicators that historically are predecessors to severe accidents. I believe a concerted effort by all employees to implement this action plan will greatly reduce our vulnerability.”