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Using risk-based process safety in contractor selection

As companies continue to leverage their resources on an ever-wider range of products and services, the number of projects (and contractors) managed will drive the need for a standard approach to contractor selection. Although time is often spent reviewing contractor qualifications for accomplishing the job scope, employers sometimes pay little or no attention to the overall safety record of the contractor. Assuming that contractors understand the hazards they will be working around cannot only place contract personnel in jeopardy, but it may also put the facility and its personnel in harm's way.

Most companies maintain a list of potential contractors that have been pre-screened as potential bidders based on experience and commercial rates. This list is often maintained and managed by the purchasing function of an organization. On the surface this appears to be an effective way to save time in identifying potential bidders. No problem, right? Unfortunately, this process can allow a potential contractor with satisfactory past performance to be automatically included on the bid list even though their safety record or personnel may have changed dramatically.

With that in mind, contractor management

should begin long before a service contract is issued. A comprehensive qualification process for contractor selection should include criteria for both the technical capabilities of the firm and for evaluating its safety programs and safety records. For example, training and facility orientation programs should be completed before they begin any work at the facility. While it is widely known that the contractor is responsible for providing certain training for its personnel, are they consistently providing the documentation of that training?

The following are useful suggestions to consider when evaluating potential contractors.

Review the contractor's:

- Injury and illness rates.
- Experience modification rates, if applicable.
- Safety staffing plan, describing the onsite person(s) responsible for safety, expertise and authority.
- Description of the safety orientation program that will be provided to all employees on site.
- Enforcement and disciplinary action program for safety violations.
- Policy and programs regarding alcohol,

controlled substances and weapons.

- List of safety equipment that will be provided by the contractor.
- Perspective on the hazards of the job and the steps that will be taken to eliminate or minimize the potential for accidents.
- Programs to comply with applicable regulatory requirements.
- Employee training policy and program description.

Employee training is perhaps the most powerful, yet misused tool a contractor can use to improve safety performance. Since the amount of safety information required continues to increase, many firms rely on videos or self-study handouts to train employees. Although programs may be very comprehensive in the depth of information provided, individual retention of the information can vary greatly depending on a number of factors including prior training and experience, training time allotted, language proficiency, reading level and literacy. Implementing some type of assessment to measure knowledge and subject matter competency can greatly enhance the training process and help to identify problem areas and trends.

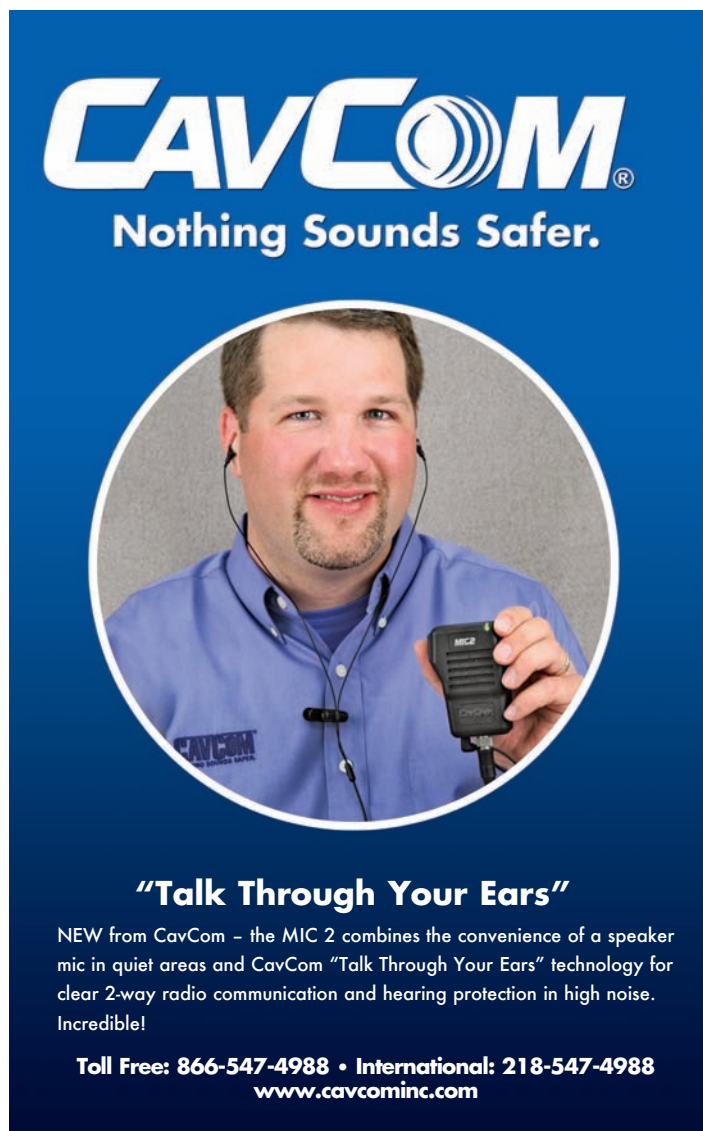
All mandatory contractor safety-training

programs should ensure proper documentation of all activities. As a minimum, training documentation should include subject of the training, date(s) of training, instructor(s) and identities of those who received the training. Keep in mind that certain regulatory requirements may also specify that documentation include a means to verify that the training was understood. This may include graded testing or documented supervisory evaluations on at least a pass-fail basis, depending on the specific regulation.

Contractors are a valuable business resource and the importance of how well they do the job should always include how safely they perform their assignments. Using safety performance together with technical competence in contractor selection will not only keep your facility and employees safer, it will also add to your bottom-line business performance.

For more information, contact Eddy Schedule at wschedule@absconsulting.com or call (281) 673-2754. □

References: Guidelines for Risk Based Process Safety; Copyright 2007, AIChE, Center for Chemical Process Safety, with technical input by ABS Consulting.



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