

BEHAVIOURAL-BASED SAFETY LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM IMPLEMENTED AT NEW MEXICO COAL



New Mexico Coal has been operated by BHP Billiton and its predecessor companies for over 40 years. Located in San Juan County in northern New Mexico, the business operates one underground and three surface coal operations that supply fuel to two mine-mouth power plants. In the early years, four fatalities occurred at one of the mines, Navajo Mine, but after intense efforts, the safety record improved. All mines have been recognised in the state and nationally for good safety performance. Over time, other operations in the US and abroad caught up with and passed the level of performance achieved at New Mexico Coal. Deciding that improvement was required, the management team assembled a cross-sectional group to determine the distinctive behaviours required to bring about a steep change in safety performance.



► *New Mexico Coal employees use one-to-one coaching as a Safe Production tool to foster teamwork and to look out and care for one another*

The cross-sectional group at New Mexico Coal, comprising approximately 60 employees and an external consultant, identified and defined the following five distinctive behaviours that can drive improvement in safety performance:



Walk the talk – This applies to everyone. Every employee must be a leader in safety, not just management.

Work as a team – All work groups must be good listeners, seek mutual understanding on all undertakings and care about one another by coaching everyone to do the safe and right thing all of the time. This attitude is embodied in the safety leadership logo shown.

Plan all work – An informal planning process called SLAM (Stop, Look, Assess the risk and Manage the risk) has been taught to all employees, and all are issued pocket cards to assist the process. Job safety analyses, work procedures and risk management plans are developed and utilised for more complex tasks.

Accept accountabilities – All employees are expected to follow accepted practices of safe work. They will be coached if unsafe practices are observed. Counselling and then disciplinary action follows if work outside the accepted practices continues after a reasonable amount of coaching is done. If cardinal rules (which if broken could lead to fatal or other severe results) are violated, disciplinary action including termination could result.

Active involvement – A Zero Harm environment requires the active participation of every employee. This includes following accepted practices of safe work, active participation in safety meetings, coaching other employees who may slip outside the boundaries and full use of all of the safety tools all of the time.

These five behaviours formed the basis of a new safety leadership training program. To gain commitment of the 928 employees to a more intense program, a video was produced in which volunteer employees related their experiences, and those of their families, with accidents including fatalities. With the assistance of a consultant who had previously worked with

DuPont, which is widely recognised as a leader in safety management, a program of instruction for all employees was developed.

In the second year of this safety leadership program, refresher instruction was presented to every employee. As well as the five distinctive behaviours, the program focused on Safe Production, Zero Harm, Zero Tolerance and Felt Leadership.

Important in the delivery of the instruction were two methods. Firstly, the supervisor and one-up supervisor of each work group delivered the training. No formal instructors were utilised. This allowed every supervisor to master the material by having to teach it and to show commitment by having to directly discuss the principles with his or her team. Secondly, learning was through active participation. During the training, students worked in table groups of usually three to six to complete tasks designed for them to understand the concept being taught. For instance, in a task to develop good listening skills, they undertook an exercise in relating back not only verbal content but also feelings.

Commenting on the importance of implementing the five behaviours in the safety leadership program, Nick Chavez, Shift Foreman at San Juan Underground Mine, said, 'It has been a big change for me from my previous job. Prior to coming here [New Mexico Coal], it was all about coming out with numbers and that's all that mattered. Now, we've got to believe it's the right way to do things'.

The safety leadership program has been introduced at a time when the number of employees has increased to support ramped-up production at San Juan Underground Mine. The injury numbers at New Mexico Coal are still above zero, but some crews and departments are consistently achieving zero accidents.

With the continuance of an attitude of caring about one another, we believe that Zero Harm for all employees every day can be achieved.