

## **Case Study: Employee-Driven Behavioral Change Improves Safety at Olympic National Park<sup>1</sup>**

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Port Angeles, Washington- Using employee ideas and recommendations and a proactive approach to the problem, Olympic National Park has improved its employee safety record. In the first full year of the initiative, the park reduced its lost-time injury rate from a nine-year average of 6.3 to a 1998 rate of 2.1. Further improvement is expected as the safety improvement system is refined and enhanced.

Park officials attribute the success to a behavior-based program that uses employee-driven strategies to improve safety communication and positive reinforcement to motivate safe work behavior. Employees identify safety hazards, coach peers about safe and risky behavior, and put a premium on safety teamwork.

The key to achieving a “total safety culture” is frequent and open safety communication at all organizational levels. The behavior-based process, which park officials launched in May of 1998, encourages this through an observation and feedback system. It’s called “safety discussions” at Olympic. Employees define relevant safety-related behaviors and then develop a checklist with those behaviors. Using the list, employees periodically observe each other with simple but effective techniques.

After each session, the observer personally talks to the employee who was monitored, providing one-on-one coaching about the safe and at-risk behaviors that were observed. In some cases, the talk provides information about risky behavior that employees may not be aware they are exhibiting. This allows workers to change their unintentional behavior in the future. In other cases, when risky behavior may be the easier, faster, or more convenient alternative, the discussions provide social support to encourage peers to take the time to perform their work in the safest manner.

Safety discussions allow the observer and the employee who was observed to analyze the situation together and identify and remove barriers to safe work performance. Olympic’s system was carried out with help from Safety Performance Solutions, a Blacksburg, Virginia firm that specializes in helping organizations adopt behavior-based safety processes.

The project included 30 Steering Committee meetings, seven parkwide training sessions, supervisor training, and follow-up meetings with all line supervisors, their division chief, assistant superintendent, and the safety manager. The process included a safety opinion survey of 107 employees and a safety evaluation profile that collected comprehensive, objective data on the park’s safety program. Both surveys will be used for future safety planning.

Every meeting of Olympic's management staff now includes safety issues and tailgate safety meetings are becoming more widespread. With guidance from a Steering Committee, formal safety discussions continue to be used on a regular basis.

**1. In *People, Land, and Water*, July/August 1999.**

The discussions are voluntary and usually take ten to twenty minutes. The number of observers, currently about 20, is steadily increasing. The Steering Committee is revising the current checklist, finding and training new behavioral observers, developing a data management program, and working to keep motivation and enthusiasm high for the new safety system.