Member Spotlight

Congratulations Minnesota Safety Council on your 90th Anniversary! I am Curt Fernandez. I currently serve as the loss control coordinator for the City of Minneapolis. I work with a cross-functional team of safety liaisons from each city department to develop and implement safety-related policies and procedures to protect our employees and keep safety-related injuries to a minimum. For the past six years, I have worked closely with the Minnesota Safety Council and have collaborated with them to enhance the knowledge base of the city’s safety committee.

Our safety committee meets every month to discuss safety challenges and possible solutions. This committee is in support to managers and supervisors to do their daily operations. We take time to listen to the frontline staff and look at industry best practices and work with local agencies, the Minnesota Department of Labor, and Minnesota Safety Council to enhance the safety knowledge and safety culture in the City of Minneapolis.

What does safety mean to your company?
The City of Minneapolis administration is fully committed to the safety and security of our employees. The goal of the safety committee is to develop a structure and define accountability for loss prevention and safety and create a loss prevention culture through expectation, open communication, teamwork and training.

Our support comes from the top down, with a fully-committed city council, the offices of the mayor, city coordinator Nuria Rivera Vandermyde, and department heads who support and help promote the safety and well-being of our 4,200 employees.

The City of Minneapolis also has an occupational health and safety policy where the city, as an employer, recognizes that its employees are its most valuable resource, with responsibility for the safety and occupational health of its employees. We have a multicultural and linguistically diverse group of employees closely mirroring the population of the city. Our managers and supervisors are trained in leadership and cultural competencies. All employees have the opportunity to take classes to increase their safety knowledge and cultural competencies. At our monthly safety committee meetings, we bring in guest speakers from groups like the Minnesota Safety Council, Minnesota Department of Labor, OSHA consulting, opioid experts and others, to talk about a variety of safety issues that face employees.

Describe a defining safety moment.
One of the defining moments for our safety committee was when we identified the need to have a policy on banning cell-phone use while driving. Working closely with our safety liaisons from each department, and other stakeholders, we convinced our leadership to enact a distracted driving policy that would support employee safety while on the road. This committee worked closely with MN State Patrol, AAA, MN Safety Council and the MN Department of Labor to implement this policy in 2016 and we are starting to see the fruit of our work now. Internally we worked with several stakeholders, including several labor unions, and trained more than 1,500 employees on the importance of concentrating on driving while “driving.” We implemented a program called “How Is My Driving” with Driver’s Alert Inc. We created a goal to educate and enhance the knowledge base of all employees about safe driving and build trust in the program to create a win/win situation where everyone worked towards a common goal of keeping all employees safe.

What advice would you give to other safety leaders?
Safety liaisons should promote accountability and teach staff to be stewards of safety at their worksites. They should support their departments and use available tools and safety messages to enhance the knowledgebase of managers, supervisors and employees. They should work with colleagues to promote social responsibility and do the right thing even in difficult situations.

I also recommend that safety liaisons work with front line staff to do walkthroughs as necessary as a learning session (without blame) and let employees know that they have the right to raise concerns/stop tasks if they see safety hazards. Encouraging employees to report “near misses” and root cause analysis could eliminate potential accidents and help others to see what changes they can make in their own work and personal lives to conduct themselves safely.

I believe in developing staff, encouraging leadership, and in the philosophy of taking time to listen to the needs and voices of all employees to successfully serve the safety needs of any organization, public or private.