

# The Human Side of Safety



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Improving the safety and health of people and the places where they work.

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## Cultivating a Culture of Safety

Writing for the Huffington Post Business blog, Kurina Baksh noted, “The concept of a safety culture is not the same as environmental safety or occupational health and safety.” Baksh’s distinction is important.

So, what is a safety culture? The International Nuclear Safety Group defines it as an “organizational environment where safety and health is understood to be, and is accepted as, the number one priority.”

This definition says nothing about how to get employees to act as if safety is of utmost concern. People often talk about “building a culture of safety,” but this is not a static thing that can be erected and left alone.

A culture of safety represents the accumulation of the environment, attitudes, and organizational systems. Like an award-winning garden, each component must be continually and thoughtfully cultivated.

Too often, companies reduce the idea of a safety culture to its processes for identifying, mitigating, and reporting hazards.

A company can have excellent processes for hazard identification, hazard mitigation, and incident analysis, but still experience a lot of safety mishaps and near misses. That’s why the U.S. Department of Labor now emphasizes the human side of safety.

In addition to effective hazard identification and mitigation processes, a strong safety culture results from:

- Positive workplace attitudes – from the newest hire to the company president
- Responsibility and accountability – across the entire organization
- Effective communication skills – especially among supervisors and managers
- Error prevention tools – clear and simple strategies to eliminate common mistakes.

Company leaders must role model and reinforce safety-oriented behaviors and attitudes. Their exemplary presence is the “fertilizer” necessary to cultivate an environment where safety stands out as the most important aspect of employees’ work.

A strong safety culture requires positive attitudes and behaviors as well as an effective hazard identification and mitigation system. It connects the technical and human sides of safety.