



AWAIR ... You're Above Average and That Ain't Good – Part 1

By Janet L. Keyes, CIH, CHESS, Inc.

Automotive repair shops are above average – and that's not good. Every five years, Minnesota OSHA revises the list of industries that must have written accident and injury reduction (AWAIR) programs. What industries are included is based on the 2017 Minnesota Occupational Injuries and Illnesses Survey.

In 2014, automotive repair injury rates dropped below the average for the state. That's great. But it didn't last.

Minnesota industries, overall, record 3.3 injuries for every 100 workers. 1.6 workers per 100 suffer injuries bad enough to result in lost time or restricted work. Minnesota's automotive repair shops have rates higher than those averages. Because of that, general repair shops, muffler and transmission shops, body shops, oil change shops, car washes, and all other automotive repair and maintenance shops are included in the most recent proposed list, adopted in early February 2020.

What does that mean for you? You're now required to write down strategies to keep your workers from being injured on the job. That does not mean that you tell them "work safer!" every day or put up posters exhorting "Safety First." Those aren't strategies, and they're of doubtful effectiveness.

Instead, the AWAIR law outlines the straightforward things you need to include in your injury prevention strategy:

Set some goals and objectives

Why do you want to have a safe workplace? What measurable, achievable steps can you take towards that? Take a look at what injuries and mishaps you've had over the last few years. Are there measures you could take to ensure they don't recur?

We don't like goals such as "we won't have any injuries." While that's admirable, it sounds like wishful thinking. How are you going to reduce the risk of having injuries? You could create a greater awareness of the need to work safely – that's a more practical goal. And to get there, you could include a review of all injuries and mishaps in each staff meeting. That's a measurable objective.

Designate safety responsibilities

Do you require your employees to wear safety glasses? To use chemical resistant gloves when cleaning parts? To wear respirators when spraying? If so, there's your first safety responsibility: to wear the required personal protective equipment when needed. If not, why do you treat this basic job requirement as different from other job requirements?

Think about what you want employees to do to work safely – follow procedures, use equipment correctly, report problems promptly. Don't forget about responsibilities for those who direct the work. Shop managers need to enforce safe work practices. That includes disciplining employees who don't follow the right procedures. But it also includes making sure employees can follow safe procedures.

Nearly all of you have vehicle lifts in your shop. You consider it the employee's responsibility to correctly position a car on the lift and to chock the tires. But it isn't the employee's responsibility to have a vehicle lift in good working condition – that's your job. And you can't assume that the employee knows how to correctly position the car – you need to make sure he/she knows how to do that.

That's the start to your AWAIR program: setting some objectives and writing down responsibilities. The next parts are how you'll identify and correct hazards, how you'll ensure people do what they should do – and know what they should do and what you'll do to prevent repeats if accidents occur. We will discuss those in our next column in the May issue. That still gives you time to write your program. Minnesota OSHA won't start enforcing this requirement for automotive shops until July 2020.

This article is intended to provide general information (no advice) about current safety topics. To discuss your specific concerns and how CHESS may help, please contact CHESS at 651-481-9787 or chess@chess-safety.com

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