



Southern California Edison's Mohave Generating Station: Culture Change Takes 5-7 Years. Then What Happens?

The safety culture change process typically takes five to seven years to become a permanent, self-sustaining part of a company's safety program. But what happens after that? Is there a need for ongoing maintenance and continual adjustments? The experience of Southern California Edison's Mohave Generating Station illustrates how safety culture can be adjusted to deal with external changes and internal needs over the course of a dozen years.

Mohave is the largest of the generating facilities providing electricity to Los Angeles. In the early 1990s, in spite of the strong commitment of plant management to safety, including the investment of millions of dollars in technical improvements, the plant had an unenviable safety record. The reasons for this were not self-evident. Management tended to blame the high incident rates on a small number of repeat offenders and workers blamed management for not responding to their needs.

The truth, it turned out, was not so simple. Though there were a handful of workers who did manage to harm themselves repeatedly, almost half of the plant's 500 workers had suffered some form of injury in the five years leading up to 1993. According to Tony Beacom, who had recently become safety manager at the plant, the problem was systemic. "Our poor performance could not be blamed on either the technical or the individual side of safety. We had a sick safety culture and we had to change it."

Culture Change Consultants was engaged to conduct a plant-wide safety culture assessment, including administering our validated Safety Culture Perception Survey™. The assessment revealed that blame was endemic. The culture assessment also indicated a huge perception gap between management and union over the quality of the safety program and management's commitment to it.

A safety culture guidance team and a grassroots safety team were set up to empower workers to take a greater share of the responsibility for their own safety. A number of safety initiatives were launched. Perhaps most significant of these initiatives was an ambitious supervisor training program that provided five full days of safety culture leadership training to all supervisors. As a consequence, supervisors became facilitators of, rather than roadblocks to, the safety ideas of the grassroots safety teams. A quality initiative was adopted by management to help the plant adjust to personnel changes caused by deregulation.

Progress was made in both the working relationship between management and labor and the safety incident rates. From 1993 to 1998 to 2003, the recordable injuries frequency rate plummeted from 13.29 to 7.36 to 1.80; while the number of lost-time injuries went from 20 in 1993 to 3 in 1998 to zero injuries in 2001 and 2003. Recently, Mohave broke its own record by going a million manhours without a single lost-time injury.

Over the more than twelve years CCC has worked in partnership with Mohave, there have been changing conditions, and appropriate safety culture interventions in response to those changing conditions. Even though the underlying safety culture remained strong, there were times when some extra attention was in order. According to Tony Beacom, "Since the first couple of years, there has been no regular schedule of follow-up. In fact, we've gone several years where our only contact was by phone. But they're there when we need them. And I don't have to bring new people up to speed all the time. In all the years we have worked together, we've only had to deal with two CCC principal consultants. They are our business partners. This partnership has endured 12 years, and we hope it lasts another 12!"

So, does this mean it takes twelve years to achieve a safety culture? No, of course not. But it does mean that organizational culture requires continuous improvement. Does it mean that once you engage Culture Change Consultants to assist you in transforming your safety culture that we move in to your living room, like the guest that never leaves? No, it means that we understand culture change doesn't happen overnight. It is a long-term effort and requires long-term relationships. We work hard to build partnerships that last – like the



twelve year safety culture partnership between Culture Change Consultants and Southern California Edison's Mohave Generating Station – so we are there for you during those times when you might need support, a culture-based strategy or just a sounding board to keep you moving forward to improving your safety culture.

Culture Change Consultants has implemented culture -based safety improvement strategies in all 13 Edison generating facilities.