CENTER FOR Hydrogen® SAFETY
Connecting a Global Community

# Safety Culture Spotlight

## "Zero Incidents Doesn't Mean Safe"

- Safety incentives compromise safety reporting
- Program goals can inadvertently send the opposite message to workers
- Short-term gains can result in long-term losses

### BACKGROUND

Many companies promote safety with financial rewards and while this can be a positive influence, it may also persuade unintended responses as one worker shares below.

### WHAT HAPPENED

At 22, I was working at a remote oil and gas site in Northern Canada when I suffered my first workplace injury; a separated shoulder. At the time, reporting wasn't exactly frowned upon, however, it was complicated by industry incentives. Our "safe work" bonuses were tied to the crew's collective record. That meant a single report could hit everyone's paycheck.

A few days later, I overheard my supervisor boastfully telling leadership that our crew's bonus was secure because we had "zero incidents." I wasn't angry; in fact, I felt a misguided pride in having "taken one for the team." It took years to realize the cost of that silence. When a permanent limitation from that injury eventually cost me a promotion, the lesson became clear: a program designed to incentivize safety was actually incentivizing a culture of non-reporting. It's a classic example of how a well-intentioned policy can undermine the very safety culture it aims to foster.

While the industry has made significant strides since then, moving toward a more transparent environment, this experience serves as a vital reminder that safety culture is never finished. To ensure we don't slip back into old habits of silence, organizations must continue to root their operations in proactive mentorship and intentional development. By empowering our seasoned workforce to mentor the next generation and learn from past experience, we reinforce that true organizational growth is found in protecting the team's long-term health, not in compromising it for a short-term gain.

Today, we benefit from innovative training methodologies and technology. These tools help anchor cultural values. We have moved beyond passive compliance and into immersive, high-impact learning. High-fidelity VR simulations allow workers to build muscle memory for high-risk tasks in a zero-stakes environment. They can be prepared for the field before they

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even arrive. Wearable technology and real-time data analytics act as a digital safety net. These tools can identify fatigue and ergonomic risks, like the ones that led to my own injury, before they become life-altering events.

By integrating these advanced tools with a focus on human mentorship and continuous development, we can maintain a workforce that is not just compliant but truly prepared – moving past the era of rewarding the appearance of safety, and continuing to invest in the reality of it.

**SAFETY CULTURE FOCUS:**

- Strong leadership recognizes that project safety should not be compromised by incentives.
- Mutual trust among workers and management is essential to a successful safety culture.
- Open and timely communication is essential to maintain a healthy safety culture.

# IMPROVING HYDROGEN SAFETY CULTURE

*LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FROM OTHER'S EXPERIENCES*

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***"Safety culture is how the organization behaves…***
***…when no one is watching."***

## Safety Culture Framework

- Safety is everyone's responsibility
- Strong leadership support
- Integrated into all activities
- Open, timely, effective communications
- Questioning/learning environment
- Mutual trust
- Continuous improvement

## What are the benefits?

- Eliminates common weaknesses identified as contributing factors to catastrophic events.
- Promotes trust in the hydrogen energy industry's ability to deliver safe, reliable, quality products and services.
- Supports a sustainable legacy for companies and the hydrogen industry.
- Fosters efficiency and productivity in the workplace.

## Resources

- For further information and resources on safety culture, see: https://www.aiche.org/ccps/safety-culture-what-stake
- For further case studies on safety culture, see: https://h2tools.org/safety-culture-case-studies

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