

Five essential responsibilities of safety supervisors

According to one classic description, the supervisor is the one individual who can take immediate, direct action to make sure that the work area is safe and healthful for all employees. Oregon OSHA has developed a popular *Safety and the Supervisor* workshop that distills the essential safety responsibilities of a supervisor into five elements. Are your supervisors excelling at all five? Keep reading to find out.



1. Provide safety education and training.

Education is generally the “why” in safety. The number one reason employees fail to follow rules is that they don’t know why it matters. When employees understand the consequences of behaviors, they are more likely to follow the rules. [Training](#) is the “how”—the practices, procedures, and safe behaviors that keep a worker safe. [Training](#) increases specific knowledge and improves skills.

Try this on-the-job training technique:

- **Introduction.** Tell the learners what the training will cover and explain why it’s important.
- **Trainer show and tell.** Demonstrate the safe work procedures associated with the task. Encourage questions.
- **Trainer ask and show.** The learner explains the technique to the trainer while the trainer does it.
- **Learner tell and show.** The trainee explains the task and performs it as the trainer watches.

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2. Provide resources and support.

Employees cannot be expected to work safely unless they have what it takes—training, equipment, [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#), safe working conditions, appropriate recognition, and support from the organization. Supervisor support also means ensuring positive working relationships. That includes making sure workloads and schedules are reasonable, eliminating distractions and hazardous conditions, and providing employees with help as needed, such as an Employee Assistance Program.

3. Enforce safety policies and rules.

It’s the job of safety leaders to ensure that employees work and act in a safe and healthful manner, comply with the rules, use equipment safely when they are exposed to hazards, and not move or displace safety devices. Enforcement also includes discipline based on facts and root cause analysis.

Once a supervisor determines that discipline is justified, it’s his or her job to discipline in a fair way. When performed appropriately, discipline should result in two outcomes: employee behavior must be changed in the desired way, and there should be an improvement in the working relationship between the employee and the supervisor.

4. Provide adequate supervision.

It's the job of the supervisor to identify and correct hazards before they cause injury or illness. Tools include safety inspections, informal walkarounds, job hazard analyses, and incident investigation. Supervisors must make sure that workers are properly instructed and monitored in the safe operation of machinery, tools, etc. They must provide necessary health hazard control measures. And they must inform employees of known hazards and measures in place to prevent and control those hazards.

5. Demonstrate safety leadership.

Leadership is a key element in supervision. As the agent or designee of the employer, supervisors are charged with ensuring:

- That work is performed safely;
- That crews behave in a safe manner; *and*
- The safety of all workers under their supervision.

Skilled leaders know that everything they say or do affects what employees think and do. A leader sets the tone for the company's safety culture and understands that everything he or she gives comes back. Leaders who want employees to care about working safely must work safely and follow the rules. Leaders:

- Are tough and insist on safety because they care about their employees;
- Support and serve their employees;
- See every employee as important and having inherent value;
- Are interested in every employee's success;
- Show trust and share credit with the team;
- Are confident and demonstrate high self-esteem; *and*
- Regularly recognize and reward employees for top performance.