Slow, Steady Pace Expected to Continue

2018 ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

2018 BUYER'S GUIDE EDITION
When Chris Emerson walks onto a shop floor, he sees what management often doesn’t: the hidden dangers behind every machine, container, process, and work space. He has an eye for potential health, safety, and environmental hazards - from substandard machine guards to improperly labeled waste containers - and a track record for helping companies address them before it’s too late.

Each year, more than 2,500 Minnesota worksites are inspected by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Due to a higher incidence of injuries and illness, manufacturing companies often rise to the top of the list.

The most common violations include inadequate fall protection, hazard communication, scaffolding, respiratory protection, and lockout/tagout procedures. In recent years, the fines for some citations have doubled.

SAFETY IS NO ACCIDENT

Emerson, who is vice president of health, safety, and environment at Industrial Safety Group (ISG), said it’s imperative that companies identify their risks so they can take appropriate action.

“The vast majority of violations can be avoided through proper planning, communication, and training,” he said. “We excel at helping companies recognize hazards that could cause problems down the road.”

Currently, ISG consults with a range of companies, from Fortune 500 corporations to 10-person machine shops, on an as-needed basis to help them become, or remain compliant, with OSHA and other regulatory bodies.

Some shops simply need occasional training on topics such as CPR, forklift operation, or chemical awareness. Others request annual audits or assessments of specific programs or policies.

One of ISG’s customers is Thermo King, which has a manufacturing operation at its Minneapolis headquarters where it makes service parts for its transport temperature-control systems. Although the facility has had safety programs in place for decades, management decided to validate and re-benchmark them.

“It’s been a while since we evaluated the details of our programs,” said Thermo King North America’s Safety, Health, Environmental, and Maintenance Manager Eric Retzlaff. “We want to validate that what we’re doing is at or above compliance for federal and state regulations and company requirements.”

Prioritizing Programs

Currently, Emerson is visiting the shop twice a week to review and update documentation associated with job hazard analysis, which is required by OSHA. The process involves visiting each work station, interviewing employees, documenting the machines used, and risks involved. Once Emerson is finished, he will produce a spreadsheet ranking the job tasks, so that additional controls, if needed, can be put into place to create a safer work environment.

“The entire process has been positive for our safety programs and employee engagement,” Retzlaff said. “It’s helping to call out additional hazards we may not have seen before.”

Prior to the job hazard analysis project, Emerson evaluated and updated the facility’s lockout/tagout procedures for about 375 pieces of equipment. Next, he will help evaluate and update the shop’s hearing conservation policies. Depending on the noise levels, protective equipment could be removed or added.

“I’m checking off programs one by one, based on which ones haven’t been updated within the last year or so,” Retzlaff said. “Once the programs are updated, they become sustainable for some time.”
HEALTH, SAFETY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Because he is responsible for so many areas of maintenance and compliance, Retzlaff has found it helpful to delegate specific projects and trainings to ISG. Recently, employees were trained on proper machine guarding, hand tools, and tool safety.

“Hiring another person who is as disciplined in these areas could be challenging,” he said. “Working with a consultant allows us to tap into a deep well of regulatory knowledge and is a much better return on our investment.”

Thermo King also consults with Industrial Waste Services (IWS) for oversight of its waste streams, both hazardous and non-hazardous. Each week, IWS inspects the facility’s waste to ensure chemicals are properly stored and coordinates periodic regulatory disposal. Retzlaff said it’s one less area he has to worry about.

In recent years, IWS has helped several companies comply with the latest changes to the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS), which involves proper classification and documentation of hazardous chemicals.

SISTER COMPANIES DEDICATED TO COMPLIANCE

ISG was launched in 2017 as an offshoot of IWS, which had been offering employee safety and consulting services since 2011, in addition to its waste management services. The safety side of the business grew quickly as new and existing customers turned to IWS for safety training and audits. Eventually, President Mike Antolik decided to form two separate companies in order to have one business focus exclusively on health and safety compliance. ISG may be a new name, but the staff and services remain the same.

“People in larger organizations tend to be strong in either environmental or safety compliance - but almost never both,” Antolik said. “By creating two separate companies, we can offer a more targeted approach to safety assessment, training, and audit preparation.”

Antolik co-owns ISG with Emerson, who has a strong background in science, occupational health, and industrial safety. With a bachelor’s degree in biology and extensive training and experience in industrial hygiene and safety, Emerson has consulted with numerous companies to achieve and maintain OSHA compliance.

In addition to developing safety programs, leading training sessions, and conducting safety audits, ISG provides onsite assistance with inspections and abatement strategies.

“We’re able to scale up or down depending on a company’s needs,” Emerson said. “A lot of companies may have done a certain training in the past, but they may not realize it needs to be repeated every one to three years. Or they may not realize that written documentation for certain procedures needs to be updated on a regular basis. Ultimately, however, our goal isn’t to check off a bunch of boxes. It’s to create a culture where health and safety are paramount - where shops exceed compliance.”

“ISG and IWS have helped Thermo King take the necessary steps to maintain a safe and healthy workplace,” Retzlaff said.
Call Mike Antolik at 651-212-4224 for more information about our compliance services or send an email to mike@isg-mn.com.