

# The Steelworker Perspective on Behavioral Safety



Comprehensive Health and Safety  
vs.  
Behavior-Based Safety

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## What is behavior-based safety?

The term behavior-based safety is used to describe a variety of programs that focus on worker behavior as the cause for almost all workplace accidents. Simply stated, behavior-based safety proponents believe that between 80% to almost 100% of accidents are caused by *unsafe acts*. This belief is highlighted by the results of a 10-year DuPont study (summarized in the adjacent box) that found *unsafe acts* causing or contributing to nearly all injuries.<sup>1</sup> This type of data is used to explain that not only are *unsafe acts* the cause of almost all workplace accidents, but that for every accident that occurs, there are many more *unsafe behaviors* that aren't accounted for. This point is often relayed by showing an iceberg representing relatively few lost time accidents and fatalities at the top, more medical treatment cases and even more first aid cases just above the water, but many-many *unsafe acts* hidden under the surface of the water.<sup>2</sup>

Causes of Lost Workday and Restricted Workday Injuries Results of a 10-year DuPont Study	
<b>Unsafe Acts Associated with:</b>	
Personal protective equipment	12%
Positions of People	30%
Reactions of People (Actions of People)	14%
Tools and Equipment	28%
Procedures and Orderliness	<u>12%</u>
Total Injuries Caused by Unsafe Acts	96%
Total Injuries with Other Causes	<u>4%</u>
	100%

These programs are typically sold to employers by a consultant. The process is similar to what we have seen over the years with many total quality management programs. The ultimate objective of the relationship between the consultant and the client is to help achieve management goals such as cost savings and a reduction in accident rates. After this consultant-client relationship is established for behavior-based safety, union or worker buy-in is sometimes sought.

These programs identify key *unsafe behaviors* that are believed to contribute to the facility accidents. This often uses information from accident reports from the past few years. Then these programs typically enlist floor level supervision or workers as observers, behavioral inspectors, or *unsafe act cops*. The observer's role is to perform a subjective review of workers performing their job and identify *unsafe acts* performed by the worker. The functions of the observation are to obtain a regular sampling of the safety program, and provide feedback to workers.<sup>3</sup> Feedback typically occurs just after the observation. Workers and the observer discuss what the observer saw. Typically observers have been trained to use positive feedback to reinforce the *safe behaviors* observed, but the observer also draws the worker's attention to the *unsafe behaviors* observed. This is done in an attempt to achieve the main goal of behavior-based safety and change worker behavior from *unsafe* to *safe*. Data collected during the inspections is tabulated and utilized to determine priorities for additional worker training.

### Behavior-Based Safety Summary

- Almost all accidents result from *unsafe acts*
- For every accident, there are many *unsafe behaviors*
- Consultant - Employer relationship
  - Worker buy-in
- Identify key *unsafe behaviors*
- Train workers/management to observe workers
- Perform observations
- Provide feedback to move away from *unsafe behavior*
- Record and use data from observations







