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Advancing in Slow Times: The Safety-Performance Nexus

*By Collin Pullar, President, Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association**

There are many ways companies can take advantage of an economic slowdown. This could be as basic as stocking up on discounted machinery and equipment, or as elaborate as planning for a merger or acquisition to better position your company in key markets. Having a close look at improving your safety management system is another consideration that may not be a top priority, but it should be. The nexus linking safety management to company performance is inextricable and well worth the investment.

Protecting workers from injuries that can lead to work stoppages and project deficiencies is a major area of concern. Industry experts deem access to skilled labour as the number one issue troubling industry in 2016 and beyond. Increasing attention is also being paid to safety violations and unsafe practices that are costing companies more than a blemish on their safety records. Serious injuries and fatalities can lead to shutting down worksites temporarily, or for good, causing major financial losses and reputational damage. Having adequate safety measures in place is a necessity for contractors looking to outshine competitors and land bids for high-profile projects.

When working to recruit and retain highly skilled workers, take a good look at your company's safety culture and climate. Think of "safety culture" as a type of investment that ensures employees are valuing and promoting safe work practices on a daily basis. Your "safety climate" is the measurable product of these efforts that can be

used to inform strategic decisions for improving safety performance and, in turn, company performance. Although safety climate typically refers to the level of employee awareness, attention and perceptions to the role safety plays in the workplace from the bottom up, the implementation and maintenance of a strong safety culture is very much an ongoing effort driven from senior leadership, management and supervisors to front-line workers and support staff.

Having a formal health and safety program in place is an effective way to show commitment from leadership and encourage the same type of commitment among employees. At the management level, supervisors are especially important players in the system as they are the ones most frequently and extensively interacting with workers on a daily basis. As with any system, a focused effort is required to produce and regularly maintain policies, plans, and the structure of the program. It may sound like a lot of

work, but the long-term benefits have been shown to save companies costs by reducing risk of accidents, damage to equipment, losses in production and, of course, injuries to employees.

Safety programs, such as the Certificate of Recognition (COR®) program offered by the Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association, ensure construction companies have the tools they need to develop, implement, maintain, and continually improve their health and safety management systems. When you have management and employees both embracing and promoting the notion that doing a job properly means doing it safely, you know you have succeeded in safety management and are sure to realize the many benefits it can bring. ■

* The Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association is an industry-driven and funded association serving over 9,000 commercial, industrial and residential construction member companies in Saskatchewan. Its mission is to provide high-quality safety training and advice to construction employers and employees that will lead to reduced human and financial losses associated with injuries.

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