

Workplace Examinations, Everyone's Business

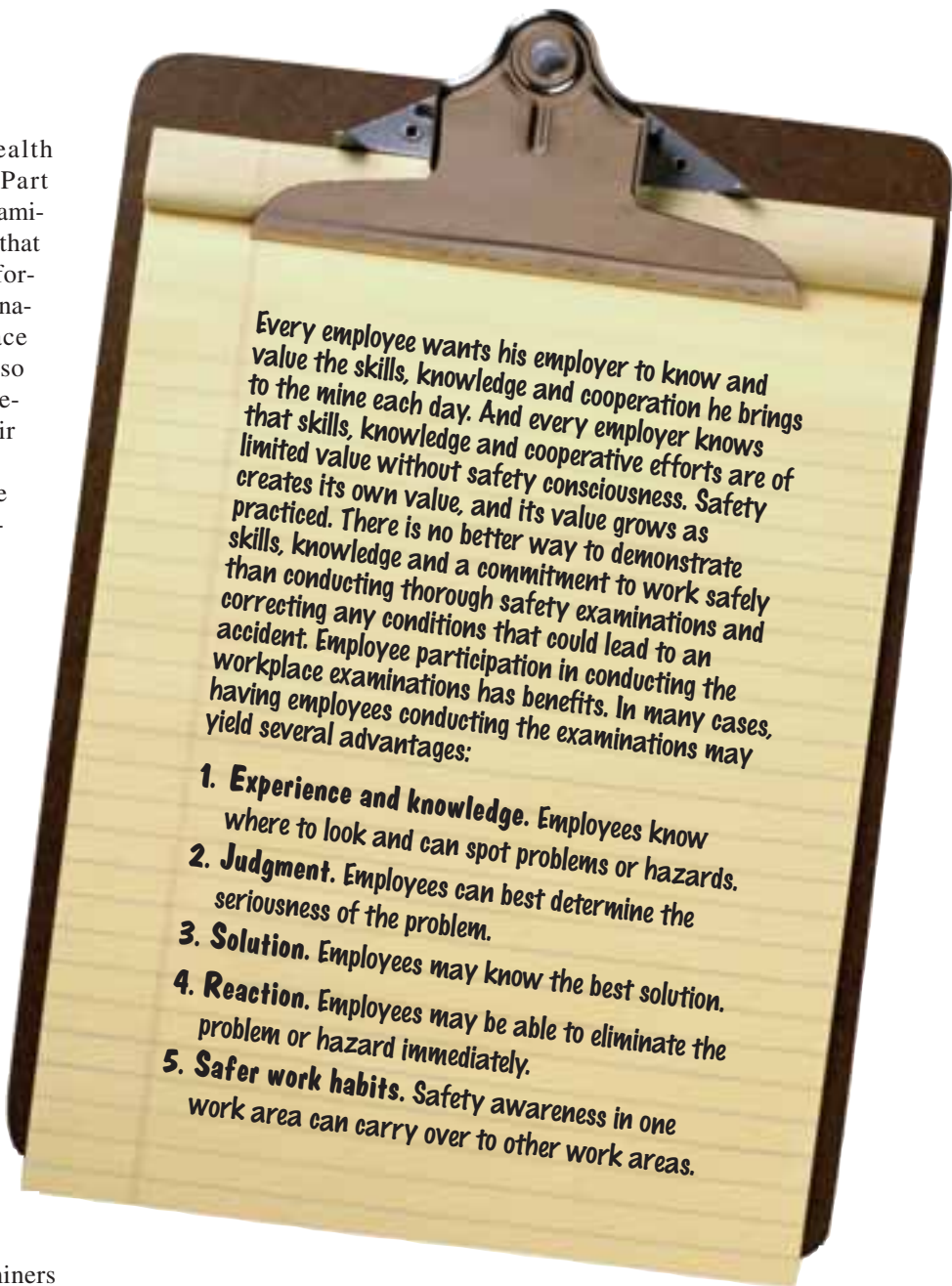
The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration's (MSHA) Part 56.18002 and Part 57.18002 "Examination of Working Places" are standards that can raise individual and mine safety performance levels. Conducting thorough examinations for hazards and to assure workplace safety not only is required by law, but also provides miners, supervisors and management the knowledge they need to do their jobs as safely as possible.

While some hazards require immediate actions—such as working without fall protection or loose ground where people are working—other potential hazards can be corrected in a less urgent manner. Degree of risk, common sense and safety will identify conditions or practices requiring immediate actions. But the potential hazards that don't make us recoil with alarm are often neglected until they need immediate action; for example, spillage and housekeeping. These types of hazards and defects need to be addressed in a timely manner for safety and compliance. Following the requirements of the examination standard helps assure that the "minor" hazards don't lead to major injuries.

The examination standard is a tool you can use to identify conditions that could lead to *potential* problems or hazards before they become *actual* hazards. The information gathered through properly conducted and recorded examinations leads to safer mines and miners; when miners recognize and are aware of hazards, they can and do act to prevent accidents.

Conducting Workplace Examinations

Conducting workplace examinations requires knowledge, not a title. Miners, managers or owners can perform examinations. The critical requirements to participate in the examination of workplaces are an understanding of the



Every employee wants his employer to know and value the skills, knowledge and cooperation he brings to the mine each day. And every employer knows that skills, knowledge and cooperative efforts are of limited value without safety consciousness. Safety creates its own value, and its value grows as practiced. There is no better way to demonstrate skills, knowledge and a commitment to work safely than conducting thorough safety examinations and correcting any conditions that could lead to an accident. Employee participation in conducting the workplace examinations has benefits. In many cases, having employees conducting the examinations may yield several advantages:

1. **Experience and knowledge.** Employees know where to look and can spot problems or hazards.
2. **Judgment.** Employees can best determine the seriousness of the problem.
3. **Solution.** Employees may know the best solution.
4. **Reaction.** Employees may be able to eliminate the problem or hazard immediately.
5. **Safer work habits.** Safety awareness in one work area can carry over to other work areas.

standard and the abilities to perform the duties. The 56.18002 and 57.18002 "Examination of Working Places" standards' requirements are easy to understand, easy to follow and can have a positive impact on safety.

The 56.18002 and 57.18002 standards have three sub-parts. Basically these are: (a) who, where and when to

examine and what to do if a defect is found; (b) record keeping; and (c) what to do if “imminent danger” is observed.

(a) A competent person designated by the operator shall examine each working place at least once each shift for conditions which may adversely affect safety or health. The operator shall promptly initiate appropriate action to correct such conditions.

Subpart (a) requires:

Who—A *competent person* is fully qualified to perform this task. This person has the abilities and experience to perform this task. A competent person need not be a supervisor, foreman, superintendent or manager...the examiner *must only be qualified* to do the job.

Where—A *working place* is any place in or about a mine where work is being performed. As used in the standard, this means locations where persons work during the shift. Remember, if work areas change during the shift, the new work areas must be examined. The entire mine does not need to be examined; for example, a remote dumpsite where no one is working does not require inspection.

When—Examine workplaces *once a shift, every shift*. The examination can be done at any time during the shift, but conducting them at the start of the shift is recommended.

What to do—The operator must *promptly take actions* to correct or mitigate any hazard identified, even if immediate exposure is not occurring (*i.e.*, tape off the area, warn employees, etc.).

(b) A record that such examinations were conducted shall be kept by the operator for a period of one year, and shall be made available for review by the Secretary [of Labor] or his authorized representative.

Subpart (b) requires:

Record keeping—Records *must* include the date, the examiner’s name and identification of places examined. Records *must* be saved for 12 months or until MSHA has completed the next regular inspection (if the operator certifies that the examinations were made for the preceding 12 months). Records may be kept in a variety of ways on production sheets, logs, charts, time cards, calendars or other formats that are convenient for operators.

(c) In addition, conditions that may present an imminent danger which are noted by the person conducting the examination shall be brought to the immediate attention of the operator who shall withdraw all persons from the area affected (except persons referred to in section 104(c) of the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977) until the danger is abated.

Subpart (c) requires:

Knowing what constitutes an “imminent danger”—a condition or practice that could reasonably be expected to cause death or serious physical harm before it can be abated (corrected). Examples are smoking in an explosives magazine, employees working from an elevated area with no required fall protection, or employees exposed to live electrical conductors.

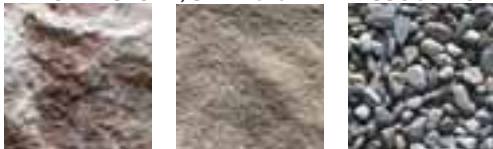
The examiner shall *immediately* notify the operator of imminent dangers or conditions that may present an imminent danger.

The operator is to immediately “*withdraw all persons.*” If people are not present, then the operator is to prevent people from entering the area. If the imminent danger is a condition, immediately have the individual(s) leave the area and begin correcting the condition or barricade the area until it is safe. If the imminent danger is a practice, immediately make the individual stop the activity. Sometimes it’s both: for example, individuals working without fall protection where safe access has not been provided or maintained at a work area. The main thing is to separate people from the hazard.

Safety is everyone’s business at a mine. Complying with the 56.18002 and 57.18002 “Examination of Working Places” standards is good safety sense and makes for safer mines and miners. For more information on mine safety, visit the MSHA’s Web site at www.msha.gov. ■

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