

## **FOCUS ON: Charting the Course to a Safer HSS Workplace**

The mission performed by the Department of Energy is very significant to our Nation's security. The Office of Health, Safety and Security (HSS) provides a very significant contribution to helping the Department meet its mission and is positioned to provide and ensure the necessary tools and resources are in place to protect the lives and health of our workers as they continue to carry out their important functions and responsibilities for the advancement in technology, protecting the environment, and the national security of this nation.

The primary mission of HSS is to serve the Department as the central organization responsible for health, safety, environment, and security. HSS provides corporate-level leadership and strategic vision to coordinate and integrate these vital programs which include policy development and technical assistance; safety analysis; corporate safety and security programs; education and training; complex-wide independent oversight; and enforcement.

In its earlier pledge to continue its support of the DOE-Voluntary Protection Program and promote safety and health excellence through cooperative efforts among labor, management, and government at our contractor sites, HSS is now charting the course to a safer workplace for all HSS employees by pursuing VPP status. HSS will be using this opportunity to enhance our awareness of safety for HSS employees, as well as enhancing our ability to provide effective oversight when we are interacting with our contractors. The emphasis on creating a safe working environment at work and at home can only help us in creating a stronger working environment for everyone.

### ***What is VPP?***

The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) began its Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) in 1982 to promote effective worksite-based safety and health. In the VPP, management, labor, and OSHA establish cooperative relationships at workplaces that have implemented a comprehensive safety and health management system. Approval into VPP is OSHA's official recognition of the outstanding effort of employers and employees who have achieved exemplary occupational safety and health.

In January of 1994 the Department of Energy initiated its own VPP to promote improved safety and health performance through public recognition of outstanding voluntary safety programs. DOE created its own version of the VPP because it must also include coverage of radiation protection/nuclear safety and emergency management due to the type and complexity of DOE facilities. Similar to the OSHA program, the DOE-VPP provides several proven benefits to participating sites, including:

- improved worker/management relations;
- reduced workplace injuries and illnesses;
- increased employee involvement;
- improved morale;
- reduced absenteeism; and
- public recognition.

Participation in the VPP underscores the emphasis within DOE that is placed on maintaining the safety and health of contractor and federal employees as a high priority.

### ***The HSS Process***

The recently formed HSS VPP committee is composed of both managers and workers from all HSS organizations. The committee's task is to evaluate the office's current readiness for the OSHA VPP application, make recommendations on necessary improvements in the HSS safety and health program, and help identify ways to pursue not only safety compliance but foster safety excellence within our own organization. The VPP committee will be responsible for writing and submitting the application which will describe the HSS safety and health program and its implementation following a standard guide provided by OSHA. Upon approval of the application, the committee will then work with OSHA during an on-site review. The pursuit toward VPP recognition will serve as an opportunity to strengthen the partnership between management and employees and move closer to achieving our goal of a safe, secure, and productive working environment.

There are many readily available resources to help mentor HSS through the VPP application process. HS-12 is currently responsible for maintaining and promoting the DOE-VPP and is therefore very familiar with the process. In addition, HSS has positive relationships with its contractor participants who will assist with the application process. Being able to draw on our own experiences will help make the process flow more smoothly.

Immediate positive benefits that could result from going through the application process include:

- Safety awareness training for new HSS employees;
- Increased safety awareness regarding potential hazards in HSS office areas;
- Greater awareness of all DOE employees to recognize potential safety concerns; and
- A clear understanding of HSS's responsibility to identify and follow up on unsafe conditions.

### ***SPECIFIC, TANGIBLE EVIDENCE THAT VPP WORKS***

- Employees are directly involved in the planning and conducting of workplace inspections, and in the investigation of injuries and illnesses.
- Employees organize and conduct community safety outreach activities.
- Safety culture is "brought home" with employees.

In the very near future the approved HSS VPP Committee charter will be distributed to all employees with their office VPP point of contact information. Achieving VPP status can only become a reality with your help and support. Please bring your safety and health suggestions and ideas to your office point of contact.

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