



Safe-T-Net, Inc.



Why Not Zero Accidents?

Why not zero accidents as one of your annual corporate goals? Sounds great, but is it realistic for a contractor? Is it achievable?

In researching this question, I found several examples of contractors, large and small, who actually accomplished this goal. A contractor in North Carolina reported a five year period without experiencing a lost-time accident. A large construction project in Louisiana worked 1.2 million hours without an accident of any kind, even first aid. Other contractors have reported between 5 and 12 million hours worked without lost-time accidents. Answer: Yes it is realistic and achievable.

Now for the reality: First, you must define zero accidents. Most contractors I have dealt with define zero accidents to mean "zero lost-time employee accidents". That's certainly a worthy goal. Defining zero accidents to mean "all accidents" regardless of severity and type is a worthier goal, but not nearly as achievable. Second, you must have a strict policy against "concealing accidents". Concealing accidents blows the credibility of your entire safety program, violates the reporting requirements of the workers comp law, and can ultimately lead to very expensive claims if the injured worker is not medically managed. Third, get the message to the field. Only your people on jobsites can achieve this goal. **Send the right message.**

It's all about expectations. If you expect a certain performance or behavior you'll likely get it. I had a contractor client that was averaging 10 lost-time accidents per year. They averaged 100 employees, so 10 employees losing work time was pretty significant. Their safety goal for the coming year was 5 lost-time accidents. A 50% reduction is an impressive improvement. They communicated this goal through their foremen and superintendents to the field. Now, most employees don't know much about corporate goals, so all they heard was, "Hey, we can have some accidents this year and still get rewarded". Meeting this goal meant a big party with lots of prizes for everyone. At the end of 6 months, there were 3 lost-time accidents. The message: we can still have 2 more lost-time accidents and win. After 8 months the 5th lost-time accident occurred. The message: Zero accidents. Guess what? **Zero accidents** is what they got the rest of the year. If zero accidents was the goal for the last 4 months, why wasn't zero accidents the goal for the entire year?

The only goal that represents the intended results of an effective safety program is zero accidents. It makes sense from a moral, economic, and safety standpoint. It says accidents are unacceptable and preventable. Make it one of your company's goals. **It's all about expectations.**

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