

DOE VOLUNTARY PROTECTION PROGRAM RECERTIFICATION

Merl Rosenthal
Waste Isolation Division
Westinghouse Electric Company
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88220

BACKGROUND

The Westinghouse Waste Isolation Division (WID), the contractor that manages and operates the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) for the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), became the first contractor to receive STAR status certification under the DOE's Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) on October 3, 1994. STAR status is given to those facilities whose programs are truly outstanding protectors of employee safety and health. Participation in the DOE VPP is strictly voluntary.

Companies that participate in VPP experience the following benefits:

- Fewer employee injuries
- Decreased worker compensation payments
- Decreased litigation costs relating to worker injury
- Fewer Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) noncompliance findings
- Improved employee morale
- Improved communication between management and employees
- Increased employee and management involvement in health and safety related matters
- Increased productivity and profits
- Positive public relations

WID's accomplishment is a clear demonstration of the strong commitment to worker safety by the DOE and Westinghouse.

APPLICATION PREPARATION

DOE contractors who wish to apply for DOE VPP must submit an in-depth formal application documenting their safety and health programs. Part III of the DOE VPP, Application Guidelines, provides instructions for completing the application. The guidelines are divided into a general information section and sections for each of the five major program elements. The five major

elements are Management Leadership, Employee Involvement, Worksite Analysis, Hazard Prevention and Control, and Safety and Health Training. A number of information sheets must be completed for each element. The sheets act as dividers and identify aspects of each program element, specifying the information required for successful completion of the application. When the application has been completed, it is sent to the DOE Headquarters VPP Coordinator. The information contained in the application is reviewed for accuracy and completeness. The signature block located on each information sheet is signed indicating agreement or disagreement. Upon successful completion of the review, the application is forwarded to the DOE Headquarters VPP Point of Contact. The Point of Contact reviews the application and recommends to the DOE Office of Environment, Safety and Health whether or not an on-site visit should be arranged.

RECERTIFICATION

Voluntary Protection Program-certified contractors are required to recertify under the VPP program every three years. WID was recertified in August 1998. The recertification was determined by a six-member team comprised of DOE Headquarters and contractor personnel. The recertification team conducted in-depth interviews with WID managers and employees to determine WIPP's safety culture. Various procedures and other documents were also reviewed.

RECERTIFICATION PROCESS

Evaluation of the WID Safety and Health Program

As part of the preparation for the recertification, Westinghouse Electric Company formed a review team to conduct an evaluation of the safety and health programs during the week of October 13-17, 1998. The review team consisted of safety representatives from Westinghouse corporate and other Westinghouse facilities. The review team developed corrective actions as the result of the evaluation. The corrective actions were assigned to the cognizant managers where the deficiencies were found. The cognizant managers developed a Corrective Action Plan identifying how the corrective action was to be addressed and the target completion date for completing the corrective action. The WID Industrial Safety and Health Section tracked the corrective actions to completion.

Assignment of VPP Coordinator/Assistant Coordinator

In early December 1997, WID designated a VPP Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator to lead the VPP reevaluation process. The individuals chosen for these positions were members of the Industrial Safety and Health Section. These individuals were knowledgeable in the operating procedures and policies of the WIPP site. In addition, the VPP Coordinator had an extensive background in Industrial Safety and Health.

Benchmark Survey of Recertified OSHA STAR Sites

A survey was conducted to benchmark other OSHA STAR status facilities that had successfully completed an OSHA VPP recertification. This survey identified key components that had been contributing factors to their successful STAR recertification. The benchmarking included specific improvements in programs, such as lockout-tagout, safety and health training, management commitment, employee involvement, and hazard recognition.

Development of a Safety Awareness Committee

In March 1998, the Safety Awareness Committee was established at WIPP to promote activities to keep safety motivation/VPP awareness continuous during the preparations for recertification. The committee was made up of exempt and nonexempt employees from the various departments. The committee conducted various safety-related campaigns in preparation for recertification (e.g., seat belt awareness, giving incentives away for the correct answers to impromptu quizzes pertaining to the VPP, etc.).

Members of the committee also acted as escorts to the VPP reevaluation team during the on-site review. The committee was also responsible for answering questions, retrieving documents, and scheduling personnel interviews between WID personnel and the reevaluation team during the on-site review.

Subject Matter Expert Matrix

WID department managers were asked to identify key personnel who were Subject Matter Experts over safety and health programs that may be evaluated during the recertification. A matrix was developed identifying those persons. The matrix was given to members of the Safety Awareness Committee for reference when a particular Subject Matter Expert was requested by the reevaluation team.

1998 VPPA Region VI Conference

Members of the Safety Awareness Committee and the VPP Coordinator and Assistant attended this conference. The conference workshops provided a strong foundation in understanding the VPP elements and how they are related to WIPP and the reevaluation process. Attendance at the conference also confirmed the strong safety commitment made by other large companies toward the integration of the five VPP elements into their safety culture.

Development of Weekly TRU News Articles

Members of the Safety Awareness Committee were assigned the duties of developing weekly VPP-related articles into the site's internal weekly newspaper (*TRU News*). The subjects of the articles ranged from articles on management leadership to employee involvement.

Documentation Collection

Requests were made for various site personnel to provide documentation of improvements of existing safety related programs since WID obtained the original STAR status in 1994. The documentation consisted of procedure revisions, white papers, *TRU News* articles, etc. The documentation was collected and assembled into binders under the respective VPP elements. The binders were presented to the on-site review team during the opening briefing.

Managing Worker Safety and Health Workshop

A workshop was conducted on April 14, 1998, to discuss managing worker safety and health based on the five VPP elements. The workshop was presented by the manager of WID Health, Safety, and Emergency Services, and was attended by WIPP managers, members of the Safety Awareness Committee, and select members of the WIPP workforce.

Comprehensive Site Survey

A comprehensive site survey was conducted by WID personnel on May 14, 1998, to assess the site for OSHA and Mine Safety and Health Act compliance to prepare for the VPP on-site visit. Deficiencies found during the comprehensive survey were immediately corrected. Those deficiencies that could not be immediately corrected were mitigated and plans of action were developed identifying the target date for correction of the deficiencies.

Safety Awareness Day

Safety awareness days were held on June 12 and July 29, 1998, to further identify and correct activities in the work areas that could result in injuries and to prepare for the VPP on-site review. Managers were directed to (1) meet with their employees to identify activities/jobs tasks that could result in potential injuries (once the activities having the potential for injury was identified, actions were discussed that could be taken to prevent injuries); and (2) walk down work areas with their employees to identify and correct housekeeping issues and ensure application of ergonomic principles. During the safety awareness days a number of potential hazards were identified and corrected. Most hazards were immediately corrected and actions were initiated to correct the remainder.

Slide Presentation

A 20-minute slide presentation was developed and presented to management and employees by the VPP Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator. The presentation discussed the following information: (1) a condensed version on how WIPP obtained STAR status, (2) what the evaluators would be looking for during the on-site recertification visit, (3) what questions on-site evaluators would ask during interviews with WID employees, (4) the activities being conducted to prepare for the on-site review, (5) the five VPP elements, (6) VPP rights, and (7) sections of the WIPP Safety Manual and Worker Protection Policy.

Results of DOE VPP Team On-Site Review

The DOE VPP team leader conducted a closeout meeting on the last day of the on-site review. Persons attending the meeting included the WID General Manager, WID Assistant General Manager, selected DOE personnel, WID senior staff, WID first line managers, and members of the Safety Awareness Committee. During the closeout meeting the DOE VPP team leader gave a brief overview of the teams conclusions. Twelve minor recommendations were developed during the on-site review. A list of the recommendations were developed and disseminated to the cognizant managers. The cognizant managers reviewed the recommendations to determine if they were applicable/relevant to their area of responsibility. Cognizant managers developed Corrective Action Plans for those recommendations deemed applicable/relevant. The Corrective Action Plans included the action to be taken and the target completion date.