

Healthier Workers Improve Safety, Productivity, and Absenteeism Rates – 16196

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ABSTRACT

URS|CH2M Oak Ridge LLC (UCOR) recognized that a healthy work force is a key to maintaining high standards for safety and productivity, while minimizing absenteeism. UCOR Management established an all-volunteer Wellness Program for its workers at the East Tennessee Technology Park, the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and the Y-12 National Security Complex on the Oak Ridge Reservation. The Wellness Program is implemented through an employee-run committee that promotes the health and wellness of employees through education and initiatives that:

- Encourage wellness habits
- Increase awareness of factors and resources contributing to well-being
- Inspire and empower individuals to take responsibility for their own health
- Promote and support the culture of a wellness community

The Wellness Committee goal is to create a culture where employees choose to live a healthier lifestyle. In addition, the all-volunteer, employee-run Wellness Committee is a low-cost, effective way to demonstrate management commitment to UCOR's most valuable asset—the employee.

The minimal cost of the program is outweighed by the benefits in reduced severity of safety incidents, reduced absenteeism, increased worker involvement in safety initiatives, and increased management visibility as safety champions.

INTRODUCTION

URS|CH2M Oak Ridge LLC (UCOR) recognized that a healthy work force is a key to maintaining high standards for safety and productivity, while minimizing absenteeism. Workers in East Tennessee face additional health challenges because the local area is facing a rising epidemic of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and numerous types of cancer.

To support and encourage workers to become healthier, UCOR Management established an all-volunteer, employee-run Wellness Program for its workers at the East Tennessee Technology Park (ETTP), ORNL, and the Y-12 National Security Complex on the Oak Ridge Reservation (ORR).

The Wellness Program (coupled with company-wide stretching and ergonomics initiatives, project-specific safety initiatives, and demonstrated management

involvement in safety) has led to significant benefits to the company. Benefits include improved safety reporting, reduced severity of injuries, and increased management safety presence.

The Wellness Program is a cost-effective approach for improving the safety culture. The fiscal year (FY) 2015 budget was \$15,000, which provided a wealth of activities, events, and wellness-oriented safety gifts for participants at UCOR.

DESCRIPTION AND DISCUSSION

UCOR recognizes the value of a healthy lifestyle as an integral part of the DOE Voluntary Protection Program (VPP). Personal wellness and safety play a key role in maintaining UCOR's strong safety culture and contribute to a strong, efficient work force. As a key part of this approach, the Wellness Committee proactively addresses issues that plague the workforce as a result of Tennessee being ranked one of the unhealthiest states in the nation.

A successful program requires management commitment, worker involvement, and teamwork. The teamwork created by the Wellness Committee initiatives has resulted in an increase in visible management commitment to safety and an increase in worker involvement in health and safety, all at minimal cost.

The Wellness Committee is comprised of multi-disciplined highly energized and motivated UCOR volunteers that generate low-cost, high employee-interest activities. Committee members are recruited from each project and work site, ensuring coverage across all sites. UCOR Management provides funding for prizes and also provides the time for employees to participate. The Wellness Committee provides information for local opportunities outside of work for the employees and their families, including hiking clubs, intramural sports, charity runs, and similar activities. As a result, there is a higher level of worker participation in these local events and activities.

Management Initiatives and Commitment

The Wellness Committee brings the management initiatives to the worker. For example, the Wellness Committee coordinates the distribution and administration of flu shots to all of the remote work locations, increasing the worker participation, thereby protecting more workers and lowering absenteeism rates without impacting ongoing operations. Because the flu shots are promoted by the employees on the Wellness Committee, there is greater acceptance and participation.

The Wellness Committee is also an excellent focal point for discovering and addressing worker concerns that may not have been brought up or addressed in the past. Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) were requested by workers at remote locations because of the emergency services response times to these locations. Wellness Committee members learned of this concern and championed this to senior management then facilitated acquisition and deployment. Deployment of AEDs throughout UCOR, including remote UCOR work locations, provides early defibrillation supporting improved survival rates from sudden cardiac arrest. Addressing this

worker concern quickly and positively showed management commitment to safety, building trust between the workers and management.

In addition, management participation in the wellness events provides an excellent opportunity to meet with workers on an informal basis and demonstrates management commitment to safety and wellness.

The Wellness Committee members also ensure that other site activities incorporate wellness where possible. As shown in Fig. 1, the Earth Day celebration included Wellness Committee-sponsored lunch-time nature walks that were enjoyed by over 100 workers. The 20-minute walk was narrated by ORNL's wildlife management employees, who talked about remedial actions, habitat design, and native grasses in and around the K-1007 P-1 Pond.



Fig.1. Earth Day Nature Walks.

Ergonomics and Stretching

UCOR has an ongoing initiative to obtain worker involvement in hazard identification and reduction. A key component of this initiative is ergonomic evaluation of both office and field tasks to identify better, safer ways of doing the work. These evaluations reduce repetitive stress injuries in workers and show management commitment to safety. UCOR has proactively addressed the hazards associated with extended computer usage and provided sit-stand work stations based on the aforementioned

evaluations. Evaluations also identified improved mechanized method for handling heavy drums resulting in reduced risk to workers.

UCOR implemented stretching as part of the morning plan-of-the-day meetings, which reduces musculoskeletal injuries and also refocuses workers at the start of the work day to tasks at hand. The Wellness Committee members are enthusiastic supporters of the stretching, encouraging fellow workers to participate. As a result, there is very good worker participation.

Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles

Wellness Committee activities that encourage maintaining a healthy weight and improving fitness included:

- Santa Claustrophobia—A competition to encourage employees to limit their holiday weight gains to less than two pounds over the Christmas Holidays.
- Biggest Loser—A weight-loss competition that awarded cash prizes to the top “losers.” Overall, 107 people lost a total of 491 pounds during the 12-week challenge.
- Weekly weight-loss tips and motivation—All participants received tips for losing weight and messages of motivation to improve fitness each week during weight-loss competitions.
- Walk Across Tennessee—The Wellness Committee teamed with the University of Tennessee Extension wellness competition to encourage walking, with the goal of walking equivalent miles to cross the state of Tennessee.



Fig. 2. Santaclaustrophobia Shirts Given to Successful Participants.

Wellness Committee activities that encourage a healthier lifestyle and celebrate safety accomplishments include:

- Traveling wellness lunch-and-learn “Work on Wellness” sessions (termed WOW sessions) on topics such as diabetes and heart disease that are prevalent in the workforce;
- Annual Accomplishments Celebration, including a Health and Safety Fair; and
- Safety Fest TN 2015, an annual UCOR-cosponsored event attracting hundreds of participants from East Tennessee to learn about safety practices at home and work. The event featured several free classes on issues such as hazardous waste work, first aid/CPR certification, confined space, hearing conservation, and many other topics.

Community Outreach

The Wellness Committee also identifies and supports community outreach activities that are of interest to the employees, such as providing support for the “Peanut Butter with a Purpose” Second Harvest Food Bank Drive that provides a high protein, shelf-stable food for family pantries. The Wellness Committee provides the advertising and worker support. Management buy-in and support ensure success and enable UCOR to provide cost-effective support to the local communities. By selecting charities that the employees care about, the effectiveness of these campaigns is greatly increased.

UCOR surpassed its 2015 peanut butter drive goal, collecting more than 2,000 jars of peanut butter and over \$2,000. These were provided to the Second Harvest Food Bank, East Tennessee’s largest hunger-relief charity. Peanut butter is the most expensive item that Second Harvest purchases. Because of its nutritional value, it is an ideal food item for at-risk children and senior citizens.



Fig. 3. Peanut Butter with a Purpose Drive.

Benefits Realized

Progress to date has been very encouraging. There has been an increase in reporting of first aid injuries, allowing actions to be taken to correct potentially hazardous conditions, possibly preventing more serious injuries. First aid reporting and immediate treatment results in lessening the severity of most injuries. Overall injury rates have been reduced; for example, the Waste Management Organization, which operates several landfills, manages transuranic waste and transportation, had zero recordable injuries and zero restricted or lost workday away cases in calendar year 2015. Company-wide, UCOR is approaching an impressive 5 million hours without a lost work-day-away case.

There is increased worker trust in management as UCOR continues to make conservative safety-related decisions. During rare, severe ice storms early in 2015, UCOR Management shut down all UCOR operations. Much of the UCOR work scope is primarily outdoor, physical work, but issues were also present for access to office and support work areas. Other sites on the ORR, did not shut down and experienced multiple, weather-related injuries, both minor and severe.

Recognition of Success

UCOR earned VPP Star Status in 2015, in part due to the actions of the Wellness Committee that contribute to a healthy safety culture. VPP Star status recognizes work sites that have achieved and are maintaining excellence in worker safety and

health protection that goes well beyond basic requirements set by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and DOE. It reflects cooperation among management, labor, and government. This accomplishment demonstrates UCOR's unwavering commitment to sustain and continuously improve their safety culture.

In addition, UCOR was recognized as the URS Global Management and Operations Services Group 2013 Healthy Operation of the Year and the Healthier Tennessee Workplace 2014. Healthier Tennessee Workplace is an initiative of the Governor's Foundation for Health and Wellness that distinguishes organizations who encourage employees to live a healthy lifestyle. UCOR achieved this recognition through their established Wellness Program that encourages and empowers physical activity in the workplace, offers healthy eating options at work, and rewards and recognizes employees for participating in health and wellness activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Personal wellness plays a significant role in safety within the workforce, with the additional benefits of improved productivity and reduced absenteeism. The Wellness Committee goal is to create a culture where employees choose to live a healthier lifestyle. In addition, the all-volunteer, employee-run Wellness Committee is a low-cost, effective way to demonstrate management commitment to UCOR's most valuable asset—the employee.