

# Case Study **BAE Systems**

How BAE Systems Transformed their  
Culture and Reduced Injuries





### “A very, very challenging year.”

That’s how Jim McNamara, Combat Mission Systems (CMS) Safety, Health, and Environmental Director for BAE Systems, describes 2022. The company saw an alarming seventy-one recordable injuries that year at its York, Pennsylvania, plant, where 2,000 workers manufacture combat vehicles for the U.S. Army and amphibious vehicles for the U.S. Marine Corps. Building combat vehicles can be dangerous, requiring heavy manual fabrication and assembly work. A surge in production and an influx of new employees contributed to make 2022 one of BAE Systems’ most challenging years for safety performance.

Like many companies, BAE Systems was reactive when it came to safety, instead of focusing on what was creating exposures in the first place. “There was no understanding of truly what was needed to change,” recalls McNamara. Concerned about their performance, the CMS team launched an A3 problem-solving activity to investigate what was driving York’s increase in injuries. The 4-hour discussion turned into a 4-day analysis that resulted in a 4-week, multi-team effort to identify the barriers to greater safety and health success.

One core safety question stood out, says Andy Corea, Vice President & General Manager for BAE Systems CMS business:

“If you approach safety exposures in the right manner and utilize the principles, it actually has a very powerful effect. Not only on your ability to hit schedule but also quality, so much so that those cultural transformations begin through the lens of safety we’re applying in a lot of different aspects of our day-to-day production business. This year, we’re leveraging a lot of those lessons learned.”

—Mark Jackson

“Is delivery of our products more important to all of us than every one of our employees going home safely? We’ve got to deliver products for our customers. That’s why we’re in business. But we can also recognize that we won’t tolerate doing that in a way that’s not safe to our employees.” BAE Systems’ impetus for change was strong, but the challenge was significant, reflects Marc Casseres, Vice President of Operations. “How do you engineer out safety hazards? How do you engineer in the right culture? It became very clear that the only way we’re really going to solve this is through a cultural transformation.”

**“It’s been a really fantastic engagement and one we’ll want to propagate. More broadly, I feel like it’s allowed me to connect on certain levels with some really great employees that we don’t always hear their voices as much as we should.” —Andy Corea**

## Transforming Employees into Safety Champions

BAE Systems had previously partnered with DEKRA in other areas of their business. Knowing DEKRA is a leader and innovator in workplace safety, the CMS team turned to them again, this time for help transforming the culture at York. “We’ve had other safety initiatives in the past,” recalls Mark Jackson, BAE Systems Director of Strategic Operations for the ground and amphibious vehicle product portfolio. “In fact, we’ve kind of been overwhelmed by initiatives to the point where I think it was diluting the message. So we were very specific about trying to avoid that when it came to the cultural aspect...We wanted it to be much more grassroots, homegrown, and real.”

In late 2022, Angelica Grindle, DEKRA’s Vice President, Executive Consultant Lead, kicked off the SafeDelivery program, a combination of DEKRA’s Executive Leading with Safety® and SafeAlign® approaches to leadership development and cultural transformation. Grindle ensured that the project plan was tailored to BAE Systems’ specific needs: Instead of beginning leadership development at the supervisor level, DEKRA would start at the very top.

“We wanted the senior-level people to demonstrate their value for safety before asking people more junior than them to change how they lead,” Grindle explains. The DEKRA team began by asking each senior-level leader to articulate their personal safety vision, encouraging them to think through how they could align that vision with the





messages they send employees through both their words and, more important, through their actions. Through a series of workshops, executive coaching, and field coaching, senior leaders were challenged to identify “what do I need to do differently as a leader?” and then put that into action by visibly demonstrating their commitment to safety. Additionally, a governance structure was put in place to help the organization focus on developing a strategic proactive focus.

After beginning the work with the senior leadership team, the DEKRA team shifted its focus to frontline supervisors and their managers. Led by DEKRA Principal Consultant Shannon Overland, BAE Systems supervisors Tracy Kintner, Tara Taylor, and Ryan Jadra and United Steelworkers Safety Chair Jason Jackson were certified as SafeDelivery trainers and coaches. Overland oversaw the trainers’ classroom education in delivering workshops while DEKRA Principal Consultant Harriet Seymore guided them in delivering coaching on the shop floor. Says Jason Jackson, “I don’t think any of us when we committed to this realized exactly what we were in for, that we were committing a massive investment of our time. But it was a huge learning experience and period of growth for all of us, especially the psychological aspects of safety.”

Overland and Seymore helped the trainers understand that every time they helped a leader acquire a safety leadership skill, they were moving the York culture closer to their goal. The trainers quickly coalesced into a cohesive team, their dedication and collaborative approach earning them the

“So I think the workshops and the coaching—what has provided leaders throughout the York site with effective tools to engage—and the structure that the governance approach provided have really created an atmosphere in York. That’s not perfect by any means, but it’s a lot better than it was.” —Jim McNamara

trust and respect of their peers. Teaching the BAE Systems staff how to develop their own employees wasn’t just good for their culture; it provided a sustainable system vital for long-term success.

The DEKRA team and BAE Systems SafeDelivery trainers focused on helping frontline supervisors and their managers enhance critical safety leadership activities such as having transformational conversations around safety, conducting hazard inspections, leading job safety briefings, and influencing behavior. The trainers accomplished this through a combination of workshops and infield coaching, providing multiple coaching sessions over six months to ensure BAE Systems leaders were confident in their skills. This coaching wasn’t just customized for the York site; it was customized by and for each individual leader based on their goals.

DEKRA’s depth of coaching—with its emphasis on asking open-ended questions, reinforcing positive behaviors, and building relationships between leaders and front-line



**"I think it's the shift in mindset and attitudes that's even more encouraging to me than just the pure recordable injury reduction year over year. That's always great to have that result as well. But it's really the more sustainable cultural transition. We still have a ways to go, but it's definitely been significant."**

**—Mark Jackson**

workers—signaled to the senior leaders that what they were experiencing was nothing short of transformational. Says McNamara, "In my career I have not seen that level of leadership out on the shop floor...I have not historically seen a VPGM or a VP of Operations going out to the shop floor and having the types of conversations that I see those people having." Seymore praises the leaders for not being problem solvers on the floor. "You're out there to coach, and if you find yourself doing more of the talking then you're not coaching.... It was the leaders really listening to what those employees were saying. They stopped themselves from being the problem solver and let the employee tell them what they think was the solution or problem."

BAE Systems newly certified SafeDelivery trainers and coaches also recognized the monumental change for the better. "Prior to DEKRA coming in, we all thought we were doing safety correctly," reflects trainer Tara Taylor. "We were trying. We thought we were saying the right things: 'how can I help you?' 'What can I do for you?' That's a very general

question...How do we rephrase that to get people to actually talk and give [us] information?"

Trainer Tracy Kintner adds, "DEKRA gave us more of what to look for. I don't think we were wrong in safety, we [just] weren't running it right. We didn't have the map of what we should be doing."

### **Substantive Year-over-Year Improvement**

Lasting, widespread change takes time—but the results of the DEKRA/BAE Systems partnership are already significant. The York site saw a 45% reduction in recordable injuries from 2022 to 2023. The severity of incidents also went down, thanks in part to better proactive measures around near-miss reporting and SIF reporting. And the training team estimates a whopping 50–75% increase in safety conversations.

Now safety best practices are discussed as frequently as performance. Front-line workers feel more empowered to seek safety information, to take ownership over safety improvements. Breaking down communication barriers between leaders and frontline workers has encouraged employees to ask for what they need instead of waiting for a leader who isn't as familiar with their area. And more in-depth conversations have led to leaders making better, more collaborative connections with employees. "These conversations that they're having now are engaging both [the leaders] and the employees," marvels McNamara.

"They...are leaving with a joint commitment to each other, not just 'what can I do for you?' but 'this is what we're going to do for each other.'" According to Casseres, "It's gone beyond safety at this point. We've seen this cultural transformation in how we approach and deal with people in areas well beyond safety."

In the wake of their success with DEKRA's programs, BAE Systems isn't resting on their laurels. They're already making plans to expand the SafeDelivery program to leaders at other CMS sites. But safety culture at York remains a priority. "We're not spiking the football," cautions Corea. "We're not done yet. There are still too many people who got hurt last year in York, so we've got more work to do. But I'm really excited about the track we're on and about the culture movement."



▶ “When DEKRA did come on site for the first time and we started going through these workshops, we began to understand the behaviors of our shop-floor individuals and management. The topic I enjoyed learning through DEKRA was the brain-centered hazards and how it impacts the daily decisions we make.”

—Ryan Jadra



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