



How DEKRA Partnered with  
**Sunbelt Rentals**  
to Improve a Culture of  
**Making Safe Decisions**

Case Study

Chances are, if you've seen a green front loader or scissor lift, you have come face-to-face with a piece of Sunbelt Rentals equipment.

Over the past 10 years, Sunbelt Rentals, a global leader in the equipment rental industry, has experienced accelerated growth, partially through the acquisition and integration of many regional rental companies and leveraging those strengths within the organization. Today, Sunbelt Rentals has more than 1,050 locations across the U.S. and Canada, with over 17,000 team members committed to delivering exceptional service for their customers.

When Sunbelt Rentals started working with DEKRA in 2017, the company faced the challenge of integrating many new team members from different cultures into the Sunbelt way, as their market share continued to expand. Because of the company's rich entrepreneurial spirit, Sunbelt Rentals did not want to stifle the proactive attitude and decision-making ability within the individual branch locations. Yet company leadership knew it needed to harness best practices to drive safety forward in a way that was holistic and comprehensive.

### **The Process: Creating a Blueprint to Communicate Established Best Practices**

By working with DEKRA, Sunbelt Rentals intended to accomplish three objectives: understand, communicate, and apply best practices throughout the company.

To gain an **understanding** of the company strengths and vulnerabilities, DEKRA applied its Organizational Culture Diagnostic Instrument (OCDI) tool, which provides insight into nine factors that predict safety outcomes. These factors integrate with on-site field observations, conversations by DEKRA consultants with senior leadership, and focus group assessments. Through this process, Sunbelt Rentals gained a clear picture of the organization's strengths. This included areas within

systems, culture, and processes where action was needed to form a path forward.

That same year, and into 2018, Sunbelt Rentals began **communicating** the results of this work to their team members. It was soon determined that, although Sunbelt Rentals team members were interested in how the company fared, they were also highly interested in the performance of their area of focus and location.

Based on this interest, DEKRA played a role in the 2018 Power of Sunbelt conference. At this conference, all location, divisional, regional, and support leaders came together to learn from each other, witness the latest equipment, attend breakout sessions, and hear directly from Sunbelt Rentals CEO, Brendan Horgan. District and regional managers were invited to get their individual cultural reports from the

DEKRA booth and have a direct conversation with DEKRA consultants about the data and what to do with it.

The groundswell of momentum in driving lasting change, combined with a strong motivation to keep people safer, compelled Sunbelt Rentals to further their focus on safety. As a result, the company invited DEKRA to create Engage for Life.

Engage for Life sets a laser focus on serious injury and fatality (SIFs). Known as "Stuff That Can Kill" (STCK) within their organization,

everything Sunbelt Rentals does regarding safety is in service of protecting life, being sensitive to STCK exposures, and keeping exposure low across operations.

As Engage for Life began to take shape, DEKRA helped Sunbelt Rentals **implement best practices** centered on SIF/STCK, starting with the CEO and his direct reports. From there, DEKRA showed leadership how to cascade skills to district and regional manager teams. Eventually, the process involved all individual location leaders and their team members — the very people who make it safely happen for customers throughout Sunbelt Rentals' many locations.

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## Engaging All Levels of Leadership and Individual Contributors

There are three basic components of the Engage for Life strategy:

- 1. Executive level engagement.** By working with Sunbelt Rentals leadership, DEKRA used its Executive Leading with Safety® Program in a series of focused interactions that incorporate safety leadership best practices and follow-up application support to foster strength in leading with safety.
- 2. Regional, district, and location leadership support.** As part of Engage for Life, DEKRA worked with regional and district managers to implement the SafeAlign® methodology with branch location leaders. Engaged in a train-the-trainer process to embed specific safety leadership skills that add protective value, local leaders were taught to better engage in exposure-reduction activities, guide front-line team members to lower exposures, and follow positive results with praise. Or, as Brendan Horgan stated, “If it’s not safe, we don’t do it.”

- 3. Field actions of individual contributors.** The organizations that practice safety best know that, unless individual contributors are already making safe decisions in the workplace, the safety messages they receive are just that — messages. But because Sunbelt Rentals’ focus was on specific and practical decision-making strategies that can be implemented in the moment, team members were guided toward, and empowered to make, safe decisions in new ways. They used DEKRA’s human performance improvement tools and strategies (Making Safe Decisions® Solution) to inform reliably safe work so that every day becomes a safe day.

“If this is to be successful, it has to fit the culture and it has to stay straightforward,” said Sunbelt Rentals Executive Vice President of Safety Anthony Miller. To emphasize simplicity, sessions were short and focused. To help local leaders engage their teams in the field, the sessions included “Toolbox Talks,” informal group discussions that teach applicable skills that can be practiced in the environment.

To ensure engagement across the organization, DEKRA staggered sessions with

Sunbelt Rentals executives, followed by regional and district support and culminating in individual location implementations.

In the field, location managers were given tools to teach Making Safe Decisions content, as well guidance on how to apply the SafeAlign safety leadership methodology, to their teams. Team members not only heard their leaders saying the right things, but they also saw their leaders do the right things. They sharpened their focus on what good looks like, so everyone knew what their safety responsibilities entailed. The design of this change process allowed for the objectives above to be realized and to drive a new level of performance results.

According to Adam Camhi, VP of Flooring Solutions at Sunbelt “Engage for Life continues to be a transformative journey. By honing our focus around engagement, empowerment, and eliminating exposures, we have evolved our culture of safety. With open-ended communication, we can see through a clear lens what our team needs to be successful and then we rally around each other when an exposure is proactively eliminated. This is the difference between being safe and being lucky.”

### **Results: Improving Performance, Culture, and Downstream Results**

By working with DEKRA, Sunbelt Rentals achieved safety performance improvement through an upstream focus driving downstream results, yielding an improved cultural framework of safety.

**Performance improvement.** “We have transformed the way we do safety,” said Anthony Miller. “From a frequency and severity perspective, we had our safest year ever.” Indeed, in 2021, Sunbelt Rentals reduced its total recordable incident rate (TRIR) by over 50% through Engage for Life activities. This was accomplished in an industry where the closest competitor’s TRIR remained essentially unchanged during the same period.

**An upstream focus driving downstream results.** Since Sunbelt Rentals began field-level work in earnest in 2019, there have been no fatalities and injury severity across incidents transformed. Today, Sunbelt Rentals’ safety performance is the best that it’s ever been in company history. While this individual data point is impactful, the key to their success is their focus on exposure reduction.

By taking specific actions to limit exposure, Sunbelt Rentals is building a proactive foundation to prevent SIF/STCK precursors from manifesting in actual events. “Since we partnered with DEKRA, we have elevated safety conversations, and STCK is on everyone’s mind. Leaders are focused on the level of exposure (vulnerability) in talking with team members. Now we talk about critical control checks and exposure control. In the past, we spoke about fewer injuries, but now it is more upstream to focus on exposure reduction,” said Senior Director of Safety at Sunbelt Rentals Mike Christian.

**A cultural framework of safety.** Today, newly formed regional and local safety councils look for ways to improve and communicate across levels. That includes the Executive Safety Council chaired by the CEO. These results have made safety a part of Sunbelt Rentals’ DNA.

Sunbelt Rentals now has a deeper level of safety engagement across the organization that leverages the most current safety science as they “Make It Happen Safely” every day.

“Engage for Life makes safety a common goal. It has been our compass,” said Christian. “It has provided the direction about what good looks like, where gaps are at, and what to do to close them.”

Interested in improving a culture of making safe decisions at your organization?



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