



How Continental Improved Its Safety Culture in Chile and Saw an 85 Percent Drop in Injuries

Continental, with one of its locations in Santiago, is a global leader in the development and manufacturing of conveyor belts and other rubber products, specifically those made by Martin Engineering, the industry leader in conveyor accessories. Continental also offers installation, repair, and maintenance services for all types of conveyor systems.

In recent years, Continental’s growth in its Chilean location has meant increasing production, expanding its product line to include steel wire conveyors, and creating customized rubber for clients. The company also launched smart services, which provide proactive service to conveyor belt clients to prevent potential disruptions and downtime.

While continually increasing its wide range of products and services for conveyor systems, the company puts safety first. “Safety is a priority in everybody’s day-to-day work, because only safe business is sustainable in the long term,” said General Manager Thomas Lau. “We needed a partner that could help reduce injuries through a best-in-class approach.”

Turning to DEKRA to Improve Safety Culture Management

Naturally, Continental found a partner for its Santiago plant with DEKRA.

DEKRA’s behavior-based safety approach focuses on establishing and sustaining a healthy safety culture across every aspect of an organization’s performance. Prioritizing the well-being of employees through cultural and behavioral changes empowers them to work more consciously and effectively. A change in safety culture boosts productivity, financial success, and market share, while customers reap the benefits of better products and services.

At Continental’s Santiago location, the goal was to:

- Reinforce training with a strong focus on reducing exposure for themselves and others.
- Reinforce relationships among employees at all levels of the organization.
- Build confidence among the workforce to engage and contribute to culture and safety performance.
- Develop the value for safety in the company, increasing accountability at all levels for an injury-free workplace.

DEKRA consultants evaluated the culture to better understand the working environment. From there, they helped the leadership team enhance its safety vision. An extensive analysis of processes and workloads followed, which DEKRA helped balance against operational goals and resources.

Enhancing the management process was key to ensure proper accountability and follow-up on commitments and goals set by senior leaders. A safety leadership assessment, followed by in-field coaching, was included to develop the ability of managers and supervisors to protect workers and to model correct behaviors, so workers could take the changes seriously and know they had buy-in from top leadership.

A behavioral safety process was implemented to help workers improve safety awareness and engage them in exposure control activities for themselves and others. This was achieved through field peer-to-peer observations and by using the information gathered to reinforce safe behaviors and to remove barriers to safety.

Gaining the Trust of the Workforce Starts With Leadership

Leaders took the challenge personally and were excited by the opportunity to change behavior across the organization. Workers were hesitant at the beginning, as this type of initiative demands a high level of engagement. As training progressed, however, employees became comfortable.

What helped ease the transition was the commitment of senior leaders to ensure the success of the initiative and the benefits of overall safety performance and culture. The commitment was felt across the organization, which laid the foundation for momentum and participation.

To boost workforce engagement, workers played a leadership role through the formation of a steering team, which included members from different departments of the organization (production, administrative, supply chain, etc.). This dynamic created a high level of expectation and enthusiasm among all Continental personnel.

Commitment grew, as employees witnessed the removal of barriers to safety impacting climate and working conditions identified by the initiative. This was accompanied by a communication process that secured transparency, maintained focus on key problems, and allowed leaders to build credibility and trust.

Continental Makes History in Santiago With a Full Year Without Injuries

Transforming the safety culture in its Santiago location, Continental proved to be a great success. Since working with DEKRA, and through 2020, accidents declined 85 percent.

Better yet, safe behaviors have steadily increased from 90 percent at the start of the implementation to almost 100 percent by the end of 2020. For the first time, Continental completed a period of 365 days without injuries in Santiago.

“The benefits of working with DEKRA are in the numbers. We are amazed to see how well the workers have adapted to the changes in our culture. Now, everyone feels they play a role in keeping people safe,” said Lau.

Indeed, workers are now more willing to report conditions and incidents. Also, corrective actions are better communicated and implemented faster. Middle and front-line supervisors have better relationships with the workforce. As a result, workers feel more comfortable speaking up about safety issues and contributing ideas and suggestions in safety meetings.

The renewed attention to safety has not taken away from the organization’s commitment to superior products and services. In fact, the company set two production records recently.