

Case Study

How One Company

Used It's Observation Program to
Protect Employees from COVID-19





When COVID-19 started surging in March 2020, the director of health and safety for a national merchandise company knew that not only were employees, contractors, and part-time workers at risk of illness but there was a chance that business could slow to a crawl.

After all, the employees worked in big-box stores across the U.S., more specifically in New York and California, where the number of COVID cases was much higher. The director understood he needed to act fast. And in order to do so, he needed to use the safety systems that were readily available. He focused on the observation program to help employees control COVID exposures immediately and used observation data to tackle root-cause issues that otherwise made control difficult.

The safety director reached out to DEKRA Consulting, which helped set up the observation system and data collection tool and to quickly pivot this system to address COVID-19 exposures.

The director's swift actions resulted in a stunning success. While it was unfortunate that one employee contracted COVID-19 through work, the company recorded no OSHA recordables from April through June. Additionally, because employees were confident that the company was making its best effort to protect them, they continued to work and help the business move forward.

Confronting COVID-19

What did the health and safety director do that led to such a remarkable success in the face of a pandemic?

He followed these five steps:

He worked with DEKRA Consulting to adapt the existing Behavior-Based Safety (BBS) process so that it could focus on COVID-19 exposure controls.

He educated everyone on what was known about COVID-19, how it creates vulnerability, and how to control COVID-19 exposure.

Leadership then conducted observations on these critical COVID-19 controls and gave employees feedback. The focus of these observations was to not only reinforce protective actions but also to understand the challenges the employees were facing.

Next, they started tracking real-time exposures from employees across the U.S. in their Adaptive BBS™ software system.

Finally, the director kept management on top of the data by using a dashboard, allowing them to quickly respond to information provided on the ground from employees.

Real-Time Response

The catalyst for change was the COVID-19 checklist that DEKRA created for the company in order to generate cross-level collaboration among employees and their managers located in the field in different cities. The checklist focused on behavior related to COVID-19 control and, ultimately, created loops

of feedback that strengthened risk identification and barrier removal throughout the company.

The observations provided leadership the opportunity to talk candidly about COVID exposures, as well as what could be done to protect oneself. It was an opportunity for them to listen, demonstrate caring, and take immediate action on barriers to safe work.

That's a big deal in a pandemic when the exposure can occur when you are interacting with store associates, vendors, and customers on a daily basis. The checklist helped employees develop a new routine when performing their work, which influenced not just their behavior but also the behavior of their colleagues.

"Of all our groups, we thought the customer-facing team would be most resistant. Instead, they are one of the groups to embrace the system," said the health and safety director.

The Added Bonus of BBS: Adaptive BBS™

The Adaptive BBS software served as the tool to record the nearly 800 observations per month, documenting the conversations between leaders and employees. More importantly, information was put into the system on the challenges that individual locations were having. This data was available in real time, so senior leadership could react quickly.

For example, if a specific district needed more hand sanitizer or if there was a potential hazard at another location, employees entered requests for support via Adaptive BBS as action items, which triggered alerts to the head coach of their respective business unit. Within a day, the hand sanitizer could be located and delivered.

"There are hundreds of these examples," said the health and safety director. "The whole communication string was amazing."

"When you go through something as wild as a pandemic, we had to have something to use to communicate in real time. It made us be more proactive and allowed us to see what our people were seeing," he said.





▶ Boosting Morale While Improving Safety

The commitment the company made gave employees confidence in their company, knowing they cared deeply about their safety. "They knew that when they voiced concerns, they were going to be heard," the director said. "That gave them a sense of security because the integrity of the organization was at stake."

"Our workers kept showing up at work and putting themselves out there," he said. "They doubled down on their commitment to working safely because they knew we had their backs."

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Email us: sms.na@info.dekra.com

Call Us: 1-800-888-9596

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