

Safety Reporting Leads to Accident Prevention

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The uppermost job priority for all South Mississippi Electric employees should be personal safety and the safety of others. SME invests a great deal of time and effort each year training employees about safe practices, providing safety devices, and issuing personal protective equipment. Much emphasis is also placed in proactively identifying potential hazards. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts to enhance workplace safety, accidents can still occur.

“After an accident, a thorough investigation is the first step to preventing future incidents,” said Roy Foster, job training and safety manager. “The investigation may reveal a better way of completing a task or identify necessary protective devices to implement. It may also help identify possible patterns in accident occurrences.”

In December, the safety department analyzed all accident reports generated at SME facilities in 2010, looking for possible trends. Overall there were 29 personnel incidents, including near misses, incidents that required first aid and recordable accidents, as well as 17 vehicle accidents and citations.

“Each report was examined to identify common denominators that could be leading to the accidents,” said Foster. “The most noted trends were related to the nature of the injury, the body part affected, job classification, and years of service.”

The majority of injuries reported were cuts and sprains, accounting for one half of all injuries last year. The next most common injury, which occurred much less frequently, involved contusions or bruises. Injuries to the arm (including hands and shoulder) or leg (including feet and ankles) were by far the majority of the body parts affected in last year’s incidents. A very small percentage of injuries occurred to the full body or to the back.

“Most of the accidents occurred with production employees at the power plants, but that is to be expected because these locations have the most employees and they are exposed to higher risks in their work environment,” Foster noted. “Employees at the Field Operations Center were next susceptible, followed by headquarters employees.

“Years of service also seemed to play a key role in the prevalence of accidents,” said Foster. “Most accidents occurred within an employee’s first year on the job. Employees with two to three years experience were next in line, followed closely by employees with four to five years experience. This trend showed a definite decline in accidents relative to years of employment, indicating that employees with more experience may either be more aware of the inherent danger, or perhaps they may be more familiar with safe practices.”

Another noticeable trend is related to the time and day of the week on which accidents occurred. In the past 12 months, accidents most typically occurred in the morning hours and were more common on Wednesdays, followed closely by Monday. Thursdays and Tuesdays had fewer accidents. The least number of accidents occurred on Fridays, presumably due to the compressed work schedule resulting in fewer employees being present on Fridays.

One trend that changed from the 2009 study was vehicular accidents. The number of accidents involving employees in company-owned vehicles dropped significantly in 2010, from 24 to 15.

“The trends we found among the accident reports are a great starting point for developing new safety action plans, and some indicate a need to continue ongoing safety efforts,” said Foster. “One key step in reducing accidents this year will be the implementation of a job hazard analysis for each job task, in addition to increased employee involvement in safety activities and driver safety training. We also plan to develop a more comprehensive safety component for the new employee orientation, which will hopefully curb the number of accidents involving less-experienced employees.

“It is vital that all incidents be reported, so that we can have a complete picture of what is happening within the organization and fully understand the risks employees face. The process is what enables us to investigate all accidents and make adjustments, so that we can continue to keep safety our top focus for 2011.”