



Suzanne Flynn
Multnomah County Auditor

501 S.E. Hawthorne, Room 601
Portland, Oregon 97214
Telephone (503) 988-3320
Telefax (503) 988-3019
www.co.multnomah.or.us/auditor

Audit Follow-Up Report #8 December 2004 Workplace Safety System

Oversight on both department and countywide basis is needed for continued improvement in the County's workplace safety efforts.

Background

The Auditor's Office issued the audit report "Workplace Safety System – Increase Management Commitment" in January 2003. The purpose of the audit was to look at worker safety and health prevention efforts to and determine if the County was in compliance with State laws, the County Code, and County Administrative Procedures. The audit found the need for improved procedures, increased awareness and responsibility from both management and employees, and improvements in safety committees. The County concurred with the report's findings and agreed to implement the recommendations.

Scope and Methodology

The objective of this follow-up audit was to determine how the County has progressed in implementing the audit recommendations. We interviewed the manager and staff of the safety team and surveyed department managers, safety officers, and worksite safety committees. We also tested a sample of accident reports and reviewed some site inspection reports. This audit was included in our audit schedule and was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Accomplishments

The County has made progress in implementing most of the recommendations from the audit. Nearly all department directors responded to our follow-up survey with information about the changes they had made or were in the process of making in response to our audit recommendations.

County departments and the County's safety team have worked together to implement audit recommendations and make improvements in the following areas:

- Revised County administrative rules have clarified department responsibility for safety efforts.
- A written safety program which meets the State Administrative Rules has been or is being adopted by most departments.
- Safety committees exist for most worksites, an improvement from two years ago.
- Safety committees report they are meeting more regularly than in the past.
- More safety committees report they are doing quarterly inspections, an improvement from two years ago.
- Directors said they have plans for integrating workplace safety into job descriptions, although this will take time and assistance from Human Resources.

Improvements Needed

Some of the audit's recommendations have not been implemented. These recommendations were based on requirements from State laws and County Administrative Procedures. County department directors and managers are responsible for managing workplace safety. However, as we found previously in our audit, that responsibility is often left to safety committees that operate without adequate oversight.

Annual Evaluations: Departments are not yet doing annual evaluations of their workplace safety efforts. These evaluations would not take a large amount of resources. We believe they are not being done because department management has not assigned this responsibility to a work group or individual.

Accident Investigations: During our review, we found that managers and supervisors have not improved the quality of accident investigations. Further, we found that investigations are often not reviewed by safety committees. There is no evidence of management oversight or review of this part of the committees' responsibilities.

Safety Committee Responsibilities: We talked to more than twenty safety committee chairpersons. Each seemed to be dedicated and committed to this task. However, many were unaware of all of the duties of safety committees required under State law and County administrative rules. We could not identify safety committees for all County worksites, either because there is no committee or because the County does not have a complete list.

Worksite Inspections: Except for the Sheriff's Office, there is no evidence that all County worksites are being inspected quarterly by a safety committee. Although the safety committees reported to us that they were doing quarterly inspections, these were only for major worksites. None of the safety committees reported doing inspections of auxiliary worksites and there was no evidence that these were being done. In one department, worksite inspections were done by one individual and reported to the safety committee. This is despite the fact that State law requires quarterly inspections by safety committee

members consisting of both employer and employees who have been trained in hazard identification. Except for the Sheriff's Office, there is no department oversight to ensure all worksites have required hazard inspections.

Oversight for Worker Safety Efforts: Outside of this review and our original audit, there is no routine centralized monitoring or evaluation of the County's workplace safety system. While we have seen improvements at the individual department level, without central accountability, there is an increase in workplace safety risk. The County needs to create and improve oversight of its workplace safety efforts on both a department and county-wide basis.

Oversight at the department level should be assigned to an individual or work group with the responsibility for monitoring the department's safety efforts and working with the department's safety committees on improving and evaluating that effort. The Sheriff's Office, Facilities Management, and Community Services have safety officer positions and the Library Department has assigned those responsibilities to a staff position although not on a full time basis. We found no other County departments with an oversight function for their safety efforts.

One county we talked to has a county-wide safety committee made up of members of department-wide safety committees, which are made up of members of division or work-group safety committees. Such a structure could be another accountability alternative for organizations with limited resources.

The County's centralized safety team should also be assigned some oversight responsibility for the County's safety effort. Currently, the County's Safety and Health Section (SHS), located in the County Human Resources Division, consists of two staff to provide training, do ergonomic and other evaluations, investigate risk situations, perform periodic site inspections, work with safety committees, and review County policies. Most of these services occur at the request of departments.

Within the past two years, the safety team has been reduced from three to two positions and also lost a clerical position. It is difficult to recommend increased resources in the present economic environment for

the County, but it would strengthen workplace safety efforts if additional support was provided. However, absent new resources, the current staff should prioritize their work to also include monitoring functions.

Recommendations

Oversight on both a department and county-wide basis is needed for continued improvement in the County's workplace safety efforts for the following areas:

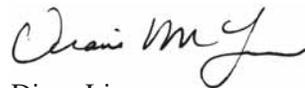
1. Ensure safety committees are able to fulfill their role in the County's workplace safety efforts and comply with State laws.
 - Ensure safety committees exist for all major worksites.
 - Ensure safety committees are working effectively and are meeting legal requirements under State law and County rules.
 - Ensure that all worksites including auxiliary locations have quarterly inspections done by trained safety committee members.
 - Ensure that all workers' compensation accident and incident reports get to the appropriate safety committee for review per County Administrative Procedures.
 - Ensure that safety committees participate in and assist in the annual evaluation of their department's safety effort.
2. Ensure department managers, supervisors, and County employees have the workplace safety training needed to fulfill their responsibilities. Specific areas of improvement are needed for the following:
 - Training for managers and supervisors in completing accident investigations.
 - Training for safety committee members in understanding the purposes and responsibilities of safety committees.

Management Response to the Report

The audit follow-up completed by your office evaluated how Multnomah County has progressed in implementing earlier audit recommendations. Your audit of January, 2003 confirmed that overall the County meets or exceeds industry standard requirements for a safe work environment. This follow-up audit determines that the County has made progress in implementing recommendations from the January 2003 audit, however, some recommendations continue to need additional development.

I fully embrace your recommendations that the County department directors and managers are responsible for managing workplace safety. It is also critical that our workforce compliment these goals on both a department and countywide basis. It is my intent to address the recommendations offered in the audit by assigning oversight responsibility for the County's safety effort to the County's centralized safety team and researching ways to strengthen workplace safety efforts.

It is my goal to ensure safety system oversight on both department and countywide levels as we continue to improve our workplace safety efforts. I appreciate the opportunity to continue to enhance my commitment to a safe and healthy workplace for our employees and constituents.



Diane Linn
Multnomah County Chair