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ITW GSE Modeling Safety Excellence

"Safety takes precedence over everything." - Clay Anderson, Operations Manager

Excellence is often best exemplified through action. Such is the case for ITW GSE team's commitment to safety. The division's facility in Palmetto, Florida, is approaching its 2,000th consecutive day of operation without a lost-time incident.

ITW GSE, the leading supplier of ground power units, pre-conditioned air units, cables and hoses, combines customer-back innovation with in-depth industry knowledge to develop and deliver solutions that are tailored to customer needs and proven to perform.

In alignment with its ISO 14001 certification, the division actively promotes a clean and safe environment throughout all areas of the business.

"Safety takes precedence over everything," said Clay Anderson, operations manager at the Palmetto facility. "Our empowering culture fosters a shared sense of accountability among all team members."

Creating a model ITW facility

A reimaging of the Palmetto facility that employed methodologies from the "ITW Toolbox," including the 80/20 Front-to-Back Process, was completed in the first quarter of 2020.

"From the flooring to the overhead lighting, everything was redone," said David Leadingham, director of quality management systems. "Now, everything has its place, previously dark or dimly spaces have been brightened, potential trip hazards were addressed, and more."

Visual reminders of ITW GSE's commitment to safety are ubiquitous. The facility is divided into zones, with each requiring different personal protective equipment. Flooring is marked accordingly, and additional visual reminders are provided throughout each space. Additionally, all testing can be conducted indoors in climate-controlled environments that promote safety as well as increased accuracy and reliability of the results.

Inspiring a safety mindset at work and home

While the facility's physical transformation has positively impacted both the location's operational and safety performance, the on-site leaders are quick to point out that the credit for achieving the impending safety milestone is shared among all team members.

"Safety is a focus each and every day," said Anderson. "We recognize and celebrate our shared success."

Process improvements and other enhancements are highlighted on TVs that share important information throughout the day. Anyone who reports a potential hazard, referred to as a "safety catch," is entered into a quarterly drawing for an additional four hours of paid time off.

"Whenever we acknowledge a safety win, we always put a person's name on the slide," said Anderson. It's important to us that each team member is properly recognized for their contributions."



Safety presentations are conducted in a team setting to foster shared learning as well as to continue to build a sense of camaraderie across the facility's workforce. In addition to raising awareness of potential work-related hazards – such as promoting knife safety – the team regularly discusses topics focused on at-home measures such as ladder and electrical safety.

“Our culture is underpinned by our shared beliefs and values,” said Jill Smith, ITW GSE's human resources director. “We encourage and incentivize a steadfast commitment to safety, but it is truly driven by each team member's desire to prioritize their safety as well as that of their colleagues.”

Leadingham noted the sense of pride that has been cultivated across the facility.

“True to the ITW business model, all team members are empowered to take ownership of their performance and lead in their own way,” said Leadingham. “People know each other and care about each other – this makes a really big difference when it comes to safety.”

Striving for Continuous Improvement

Much of ITW GSE's safety success can be attributed to a continuous improvement mindset rooted in quantitative and qualitative data.

All reported safety catches are recorded on tasked sheets posted within the facility that list the issues, when they were addressed and the time it took for each to be resolved.

“All employees can see what the safety team is working on at any given time,” said Anderson. “Our safety-first culture is built on trust, and we take pride in addressing all incidents in a timely, efficient manner.”

The team's safety audits have shown a positive trend since the facility's transformation, but it vigilantly guards against complacency.

“We're not OK with perfect audit scores time and time again,” said Anderson. “That's not doing anyone any good; we need to have things to constantly work on.”

ITW GSE formed a division-wide safety committee in 2021, which includes team members from the U.S. and Denmark offices, to share common issues and best practices. The committee recently broadened its focus to cover all environmental, health and safety topics.

“We're always focused on improving,” said Leadingham. “That's how we've achieved our stellar safety record and how we'll continue to build on our momentum.”

