

Specialty Safety Services, Inc.

Your "What's Hot" Newsletter

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What Ever Happened to L&I's Tri-Annual Safety Audit? by Herb Sherburne

Be Proactive, is the first of Steven Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People and I believe the cornerstone of a successful safety program. As safety professionals we understand the importance of safety audits. Proactive audits (both facility inspections and safety policy reviews) ensure that companies are staying ahead of problems not just reacting to incidents.

When I was Safety Manager for The Seattle Times, Gordon Coffey was my safety consultant. Gordon worked for our third party administrator and one of his yearly safety goals was to make sure The Times was always ready for its tri-annual safety program audit for self-insured employers. One of my annual safety goals was to make sure The Times was in an audit-ready state – all the time - to the best of our ability.

The tri-annual safety program audit was performed in tandem with the tri-annual claims audit as a requirement of all self-insured employers. Both audits were conducted by the Self-Insurance Department of Labor and Industries. The tri-annual safety program audit was not a compliance inspection with monetary fines. Instead of penalties, employers were sent "directives to comply." These tri-annual safety audits served two basic purposes: First, the audits helped the self-insured community stay compliant with their required safety program activities and documentation. Second, the audits were built-in (every three years) and predictable. An impending audit made it easier to pressure operations managers to keep on top of safety issues.

In a recent phone conversation with the Department's Compliance Section, I learned that The Department no longer conducts the tri-annual safety audits as part of their regular program. However, the Department made it very clear all self-insured employers are subject to the safety program audit and The Department retains the right to conduct an audit if they wish. At the present time a safety audit is usually conducted as the result of a referral during the self-insured employer's tri-annual claims audit.

And what about Washington's non-self-insured or state fund employers? State fund employers are just as responsible for the safety program audit as the self-insured employers. The only difference is that L&I chose to hold the self-insured employers liable for a routine audit. State fund employers have their safety programs audited typically as part of an L&I compliance inspection.

This is our chance to be proactive. We have the opportunity to conduct internal audits for the right reason: not because of government regulations (fear of an inspection) but because safety program audits help to ensure that any company's accident prevention program is effective in practice. That is, it provides all employees with a safe workplace.

Herb Sherburne joins Specialty Safety Services as a guest columnist and safety trainer. For the past five years Herb has been the Training Coordinator for the Washington Self-Insurer's Association. Prior to joining WSIA, Herb Sherburne worked twenty-five years for The Seattle Times, thirteen of those years as The Times Safety Manager. Herb has twelve years experience as an authorized trainer of the Steven Covey Institute's "7 Habits of Highly Effective People."