

Y-12's Environment, Safety and Health history part 3

The Voluntary Protection Program is the culmination of 15 months of effort at Y-12 to qualify for that highly sought after level of recognition in the world of safety culture. Yet, the idea had been several years in the making. Several approaches had been tried over the years to bring maximum attention to safe behaviors. Each brought added awareness and increased attention to the prevention of accidents.

While some of those initiatives have been more successful than others, the Voluntary Protection Program is recognized as one of the most effective approaches to come along. Both Y-12 workers and management are justifiably proud of the accomplishment.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's website, Star status is: "Recognition for employers and employees who demonstrate exemplary achievement in the prevention and control of occupational safety and health hazards and the development, implementation and continuous improvement of their safety and health management system."

Y-12 achieved the enviable VPP Star status on June 5, 2012. That is when the ceremony was held at the New Hope Center and the VPP Star status flag was hoisted up the flagpole to proudly proclaim the importance placed on safety at Y-12.

An announcement at the time stated, "Issued by the U.S. Department of Energy, the DOE Voluntary Protection Plan (VPP) flag was presented to Y-12...It is a symbol of excellence in the pursuit of health and safety. VPP represents a strong commitment by Y-12 employees, the unions and management to continually strive for a safe workplace."

An article published in Y-12's internal online communication, YSource, stated, "DOE-VPP encourages and recognizes excellence in occupational safety and health protection and closely mirrors the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA's) VPP. Available to all contractors and subcontractors in the DOE complex, DOE-VPP outlines areas in which participants can surpass compliance with DOE orders and OSHA standards."

At the time that Y-12 achieved Star status, 28 entities across the United States held DOE-VPP Star status, including Oak Ridge Associated Universities, also in Oak Ridge.

While Y-12 has implemented a variety of safety programs over the years, VPP is different in a number of respects from all other such programs. VPP encourages each of us to think about the other and to look out for the safety of others as well as yourself.

VPP includes an emphasis on the "ripple effect" of risk — how one person's behavior can affect the lives of others even to include the other person's loved ones. Safety consciousness is a mindset. Zero tolerance for injuries is the goal.

As VPP was being implemented, both management and labor worked together to bring attention to the needed steps to assure success. Mike Thompson, Atomic Trades and Labor Council vice president, reflected, "As a facility, when we raise the safety standard, we make ourselves more marketable when we compete for work. VPP Star status increases job opportunities because people want to bring work to Y-12."

Bill Klemm, a retired U.S. Navy admiral, led the management efforts alongside Thompson. Klemm likened achieving VPP Star status to implementing quality standards for the environment. He said, "If a company is certified in these standards, then customers of those companies know that they need not go inspect the company's processes in those areas. Potential employees of companies who have VPP certification know that the company will value them as human beings and will not use them and throw them away at the end of the day."

Achieving Star status is really just the beginning of a long-term process to maintain safe conditions and behavior. Y-12 will conduct self-assessments annually, and the Star status is subject to removal if an assessment finds safety measures and attitudes slipping.

VPP is the accepted standard for safety among many industries that achieve excellence in safety. Y-12's intent is to continue to learn new and better ways to raise awareness and increase attention to details of keeping a safe workplace and safe working conditions. It is our goal that each one of us goes home each and every day in the same safe condition as we arrived at work.

Safety off the job is important as well. The principles learned in VPP implementation on the job apply there as well. Once the mindset takes hold, it is natural to view safe behaviors as important to protecting yourself and your family in all aspects of life.

So, achieving zero injuries is becoming a realizable goal at Y-12. With all of us pulling together as one team, success is assured.

With the July 1, 2014, contract change that brought Consolidated Nuclear Security, LLC, which is comprised of member companies Bechtel National, Inc., Lockheed Martin Services, Inc., ATK Launch Systems, Inc., and SOC LLC, with Booz Allen Hamilton, Inc. as a teaming subcontractor, the ability to share insights on safety now includes ideas from both Y-12 and Pantex.

As stated on the CNS website, the company is dedicated to tackling the challenges facing Pantex and Y-12 and to ensure the most successful future. Safety of all personnel is paramount for both sites of the team as we face the future together and learn from each other how to achieve even greater success of our combined safety culture. Zero injuries is the goal!