

Part of making your law firm an extraordinary place to work is making it a safe place to work, too. Legal administrators can take a few critical but easy steps to keep their offices injury-free.



**SAFE
AT
WORK**

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Imagine that one of your children has secured his or her first job with an organization in the legal profession. Your child calls you after the first day at work and says, "At the orientation today, they said there is a likelihood that I will either be injured on the job while working for this company."

How would you react? If you're like most parents, you would tell your child not to work for that organization. After all, who would want any family member to work in a company where the assumption was that people could be injured?

SHORTCUT

Is your law firm a safe place to work? Take several key steps to ensure that attorneys and staff are following the philosophy of a zero-injury workplace.

Nevertheless, can a business really aspire to have zero injuries in the workplace? Many executives, managers, supervisors and workers think not. But if you say, "Zero injuries are not possible in our workplace," you're basically telling employees that they could be hurt at work

The solution? To attain zero injuries in the workplace, you must have a serious goal of zero injuries. Beyond that, you must believe that achieving zero injuries is possible and have that belief become central to the entire firm's philosophy. The solution may seem simple, but it works.

THE CURRENT STATE OF WORKPLACE SAFETY

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration, more than 5,700 workers died from a workplace injury and illness in 2004. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 4.4 million workers were injured or became ill on the job in 2003. Consequently, companies spend more than \$50 billion a year dealing with injuries and illnesses, making the United States less competitive in the world market.

With all this money going towards safety-related issues, why are workers still becoming injured on the job? Many organizations do not have an over-arching safety philosophy. The demands of competition, globalization, mergers and acquisitions often take priority in the minds of managers and executives, sometimes leaving safety issues on the "back burner."

Managers can create sustainable, positive change by developing a philosophy that promotes safety and health and de-emphasizing the focus on compliance. The philosophy must give equal weight to five areas: management commitment, employee involvement, worksite analysis, hazard prevention and health and safety training.

HIGHER SAFETY STANDARDS

Adopting high safety standards is easier than you may think. In fact, all it takes is four simple steps:

1. **Understand the five areas that must be covered.** They are:

- **Management commitment:** Providing outstanding protection to employees through effective systems, such as emergency evacuation plans.
- **Employee involvement:** Employee interest and involvement in safety and health processes at work, including accident and incident investigations, suggestion programs, disaster recovery planning and safety committees.
- **Worksite analysis:** A systematic approach to assessing and managing workplace hazards. Look around your firm: What dangers lurk in unlikely places? Do you have old file cabinets that tip over easily? Does your mailroom have so many boxes that could cause someone to fall or could create a fire hazard?
- **Hazard prevention and control:** Make a commitment to workplace health and safety through preventative equipment maintenance, workplace health processes, hazard tracking methods and emergency preparations.
- **Safety and health training:** Do members of your staff know the basics of first aid or CPR? Do they know where emergency exits and fire extinguishers are located? Has the firm conducted a fire drill recently?

2. **Develop a safety philosophy in the organization.** Ask yourself:

- Does my firm really make worker safety and health a priority?
- Do the managers understand their moral and legal obligations about safety and health?
- Do we really believe the firm can achieve zero injuries?

The answers to these questions will tell you what your firm's safety philosophy is. Realize that you may have to work to educate law firm leaders and get their thinking aligned with the importance of creating a workplace where safety and worker health are paramount concerns.

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3. **Determine the current state of the firm's health and safety management program.** After analysis of where your firm is, develop a vision of where the firm should be.
4. **Reveal the gap between the current state and the future state of health and safety for your firm.** Only then can you begin to take purposeful actions to fill the gaps and create an environment where everyone can go home every day without injury.

A SAFER, MORE PROFITABLE FUTURE

Having a zero-injury law firm is possible. If you can lead your attorneys and staff to go one hour without an injury, then you can lead them through hours that turn into days, weeks, months and years.

Remember, the greatest legacy a legal administrator can leave is that he or she managed a sound, profitable law firm from which everyone went home every day without injury. ✨

about the authors

Carl Potter, CSP, CMC, and **Deb Potter, Ph.D., CMC**, are well-known speakers and consultants on workplace safety. They have authored several books, including *Simply Seamless Safety* and *Zero! Responsible Safety Management by Design*. For more information, visit the Potter and Associates Web site at www.potterandassociates.com or call (800) 259-6209.

LEARN MORE

ALA Resources

These titles are available through ALA's Web site, www.alanet.org/bookstore.

- *Front Desk Security & Safety: An On-the-Job Guide to Handling Emergencies, Threats, and Unexpected Situations*, by Betty A. Kildow
- *Disaster Survival Planning: A Practical Guide for Businesses*, by Judy Kay Bell
- *Think Ahead: How to Prepare a Law Firm Strategic Plan*, updated by Paul Andersen

The following articles are available in the *ALA Management Encyclopedia (ALAME)*, www.alanet.org/alame.

- "Disaster Planning: Why And How"
- "How To Create Effective Business Continuity Plans Before Disaster Strikes"

The following are accessible via ALA's Legal Management Resource Center, <http://thesource.alanet.org>.

- "Safety and Health Topics: Workplace Violence," U.S. Department of Labor – Type keywords "workplace safety" in the search engine

- "A Security & Safety Readiness Assessment," Workforce Management Online – Type keyword "safety" in the search engine

On the Web

- Cornell Law School, "Workplace safety" – www.law.cornell.edu/wex/index.php/Workplace_safety
- American Red Cross, "Preparing Your Business For the Unthinkable" – www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0_606_,00.html

On the Shelf

The following titles are available for purchase or download through many online retailers, including www.amazon.com.

- *Maintain Workplace Safety*, by Stephen Harvey
- *Workplace Safety: A Guide for Small and Midsized Companies*, by Steve Thompson and Dan Hopwood
- *OSHA in the Real World: How to Maintain Workplace Safety While Keeping Your Competitive Edge*, by John Hartnett