

## **County Commission Update: Taking Safety Seriously**

By Wade Mathews, Public Information Officer

For several years now the Tooele County government has actively pursued increasing safety and decreasing accidents in the workplace and thereby reducing injury claims. Those efforts have paid off in multiple ways.

Tooele County Commissioners recently learned the County is a recipient of the 2012 Charles A. Cain Award for Workplace Safety. The prestigious award comes from the Workers Compensation Fund.

WCF President and CEO Ray Pickup wrote in a letter to the county, "Your company was nominated because of its outstanding safety practices and is one of only 14 companies to receive an award this year."

The County identified the Risk Assessment Program and the Accident Review Board as two of its many "outstanding safety practices."

The County Clerk, Marilyn Gillette, manages the County's participation in the Utah Counties Indemnity Pool (UCIP), in other words the insurance program. In September 2010, UCIP asked Tooele County to be the first in the state to utilize its pilot safety program: the Risk Assessment Program (RAP).

RAP encourages each department in the County to hold weekly safety training meetings on various subjects with training materials being provided by UCIP. The topics range from fire safety and toxic materials to all types of harassment and substance abuse prevention. It also incorporates a hazard reporting program for employees.

The RAP assists with disciplinary actions for unsafe employees. The County can see that the offenders are completing the required safety trainings. But the program also rewards good behavior up front. There are incentives such as pizza lunches and gift cards to local retailers for departments that have at least 70% attendance at 70% of the trainings.

Gillette said, "The training has often resulted in identification and reporting of things needing to be fixed. Employees are beginning to ask 'Are we in compliance?' Through RAP we are trying to impress on employees that we want them safe. They are our most important asset."

The Accident Review Board consists of the Commissioners, County Clerk, Human Resources Director, Attorney, Parks & Recreation Director, Roads Director, Solid Waste Director, and the Sheriff.

At each quarterly meeting, the Board reviews past liability claims and workers compensation claims. Each supervisor must explain what happened, any corrective actions involving the employee, and preventative actions taken. The Board also looks for trends in accidents or claims that can be remedied.

Human Resource Director Pam Ayala says, "The Board demonstrates to employees the County is taking a top-down approach to safety. We're taking it very seriously. Having supervisors explain the situations creates ownership. The result is we're seeing a reduction in the severity of the claims."

Commissioner Colleen Johnson explained some of the benefits of the County's safety programs. "By making safety a priority and having trainings and reporting even the smallest accidents it is making people more aware. It's saving the county a lot of money by reducing lost work time and personal injury claims. Those really add up after a while. The biggest thing it has done is made people more aware of the potential of an accident and as a result they're more careful. With the Accident Review Board, employees know they'll have to explain what happened and why they did it."

Commissioner Jerry Hurst said, "They're both good programs. As I go around and visit my departments they're all implementing them. We even participate in the Commission office. It stimulates the thought process that we take things for granted and it brings things to our attention. We can be better in safety in the workplace. It's a good reminder. On the accident review board we look at where we've been and where we're going with the accident rates and what we can do to reduce accidents. We go through the list of claims and results and compare them to previous years to look for ups and downs to see where we need to concentrate."

Tooele County also has a Safety Committee, chaired by the Human Resources Director, Pam Ayala. The committee consists of one member from each department. At regular meetings, the Committee discusses any safety concerns that anyone might have.

The County also maintains and issues to each employee a Safety Guidebook and an Emergency Handbook. Tooele County Emergency Management recently updated the Emergency Handbook. The County participated in the Utah ShakeOut drill to practice and test the procedures in the Handbook.

The County will receive the award at a recipients' luncheon in Salt Lake City on Tuesday, June 5, 2012.