



USDA Forest Service

Safety and Health Strategic Plan 2002



"The Relentless Pursuit of Employee Protection"

Dale N. Bosworth, Chief

May 2002

Prepared by the Forest Service Safety and Health Council



United
States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of the Chief

Washington Office
Human Resources
Management

Safety and Health

Forest Service Safety and Health Program



FOREST SERVICE SAFETY POLICY STATEMENT

Excellence in Safety Management

As a world-class leader in natural resources management, the Forest Service has a responsibility to protect its most valuable resource – our employees. I share a commitment with my National Leadership Team to provide for the safety and well being of every employee and for the public we serve.

The success of the Forest Service's mission depends on how effectively we incorporate safety and health into our culture and our daily behavior. Including safety and health in the planning and execution of our daily business ensures our employees are provided with working environments that enhance their ability to accomplish the Forest Service mission. We must take a proactive, inclusive approach in designing work projects and activities, and in developing supporting policies and procedures to ensure that our employees are never in "harms way."

In the Forest Service, safety is more than just a word. Safety is:

"The Relentless Pursuit of Employee Protection"

My support of the safety and health program is unquestionable. Safety is both a personal and a Forest Service responsibility. Therefore, I expect every manager, supervisor, and employee to do everything possible to ensure zero tolerance for placing employees at risk and for providing the public a safe environment within the National Forest System lands.

/s/ Dale N. Bosworth
DALE N. BOSWORTH
Chief



USDA Forest Service

Safety and Health

Strategic Plan

2002

The Relentless Pursuit of Employee Protection

OUR CHALLENGE AND MISSION

Our challenge and mission are to create a proactive, inclusive culture within the Forest Service, where the safety and health of all employees, volunteers, cooperators, program enrollees, and others working for the agency or on Forest Service lands, as well as visitors to the National Forests, are a paramount concern. Our goal is to incorporate health and safety into our work projects, activities, and program policies, resulting in workplaces that are free from recognized hazards.

The challenge is significant. The Forest Service consists of nearly 200,000 employees, volunteers, and other human resource enrollees (hereafter referred to as "employees"). We serve several hundred million external customers each year. We manage 191 million acres of vastly diverse landscapes and resources. We work over 100 million hours annually and drive nearly 220 million miles each year. Much of the work we do is recognized by industry as being susceptible to the highest accident rates of all professions. However, we firmly believe that the safety and health improvements we make for our workers will result not only in significantly reversing this susceptibility but also help create a safe environment for our external customers. This report is designed to be a living document that will be reviewed periodically by the Forest Service leadership, the Safety and Health Council, and the Region/Station/Area/IITF safety and health managers, and promoted among all Forest Service employees. The subsequent action plan to be developed from this document by the Forest Service Safety and Health Council will be highly visible, proactive, observable, and measurable. Every year the Council will review the strategic plan and resulting action plan and modify as needed. Such modifications will be submitted to the Designated Agency Safety and Health Official (DASHO) and the Forest Service leadership for approval.

BACKGROUND

While many tasks that Forest Service employees are involved in today are essentially the same as they have been over many years, many are not because of changes in technology, ecosystem management priorities, diversity, and changing public education. Employees are exposed to many hazards, which include physical and emotional stressors, fatigue, acts of violence, disease, and potential death from explosives, fire, timber, and aviation operations. Legal mandates are also increasing at a time when our resources have been drastically reduced. For example, the Forest Service is currently experiencing difficulty providing drinking water that meets current public health standards, and our older facilities do not always meet current safety and health codes. We are being constantly challenged to provide the support structure needed to keep our employees out of harm's way.

We need to learn how to manage our work so that recognized hazards are eliminated. Because of increasingly complex work, budget constraints, and reorganizations, the most effective action managers can take is to have a positive, proactive, and integrated safety and health program that is led by educated safety and health professionals. The program must ensure that hazards are anticipated and recognized, promptly abated, and safety and health concerns are addressed throughout the work process – from planning through implementation.

In October 2000, the Deputy Chief for Business Operations, who is also the Designated Agency Safety and Health Official (DASHO), chartered the Forest Service Safety and Health Council to review, consult, and provide policy advice to the DASHO on the implementation of a consistent, highly visible, proactive safety and health program for the Forest Service. The first task given to the Council was to develop a strategic plan for implementing the safety and health program. This report outlines that strategic plan.

CURRENT SITUATION

During these times of rapid change, there have been some examples of significant improvements made in the Forest Service safety and health program. There is a marked increase in Region/Station/Area top management commitment to safety and health programs as seen by the increase in full-time safety and health professionals at the Forest level. Quality training is being provided to many local units, which allows them to implement positive, proactive, state-of-the-art, professional, and employee-involved safety and health programs.

Most recently we have significantly updated and promulgated the Health and Safety Code Handbook, issued an Accident Investigation Guide, and developed protocols for Chief's Office accident investigations. The Hazardous Material Interim Directive (incorporating explosive and radiation safety) has been promulgated, as have the Explosive Safety guide and the interim directive on Scientific Diving. In addition, the first video in a five video series on "Prevention of Violence in the Workplace" has been distributed to all Regions and Stations.

On the other hand, accident review board action items indicate that we are not learning from our mistakes. We continue to experience similar incidents. Also, OSHA-accident inspections and environmental compliance audits in several Forest Service locations indicate that the Forest Service is not consistently in compliance with numerous safety and health regulations. For example, after a recent tree felling fatality, OSHA investigators found that employees, including supervisors, had not received required logging safety training.

Internal Safety and Health Program reviews indicate that many employees believe the safety and health program lacks visibility. Despite recent increases in the number of professional safety and health managers, the lack of visibility is often attributed to the still-low levels of staffing and funding for safety and health. Other impacts on safety and health program visibility and effectiveness include nonsafety-related collateral duty work typically assigned to safety and health managers, and to a general reduction in attention to Forest Service policies, basic safety practices, safety monitoring, and safety accountability. By emphasizing basic safety and health practices, planning, implementing, monitoring, and accountability, we can decrease problems and increase the visibility and effectiveness of the safety and health program.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS AND HOW WE PLAN TO ATTAIN THEM

By implementing this plan and the subsequent action items to be developed from this plan, all employees, visitors, and others will be afforded increased protection from harm, and all employees and management will adhere to a strong safety and health ethic and culture.

Our goals:

- Hazards are promptly identified and abated.
- Management is committed to providing employees a place of employment that, is free from recognized hazards.

- Employees take responsibility for their personal safety by following safe practices and reporting unsafe conditions.
- Safe and healthful working environments are achieved through a positive, proactive, and integrated process.
- Visitors enjoy an environment free from recognized hazards.

To achieve these goals, we have identified strategies in the following five areas:

1. Culture
2. Communication
3. Resources
4. Education
5. Accountability

1. Culture

Desired Condition

The Forest Service community is a culture where safety is understood, accepted, promoted, rewarded, and continually improved. The Forest Service community and leadership promote, create, and sustain safe and healthful work environments, attitudes and practices in all program areas.

The Strategy

There is a need to better understand why the current Forest Service culture might prevent us from achieving our desired condition. For example, there is an acceptance of risk-taking in some tasks, rather than an emphasis on risk prevention and risk management. Also, there is an emphasis and reward system for producing targets and having an attitude of “can-do” and “getting by with less,” but less recognition for a job done safely.

- a. The Forest Service will demonstrate strong, visible, and active leadership in safety and health issues by:
 - 1) Strengthening leadership in safety and health issues in our current leaders through training and better understanding of roles and responsibilities.
 - 2) Cultivating new leadership in safety and health throughout the workforce.
 - 3) Re-emphasizing that the DASHO (through the safety and health manager) has oversight authority for all safety and health issues in the Forest Service.

- 4) Developing stronger ties between the safety and health managers at all levels of the organization, with the safety components in all program areas (e.g., fire, aviation, environment, range, fleet, research).
 - 5) Clearly describing safety and health roles and responsibilities for functional areas – emphasizing the responsibility to coordinate the integration of safety and health into work planning and work programs.
 - 6) Developing performance measures to assess the health and safety programs of administrative units. The performance of all units will be summarized in an annual report and made available to Forest Service staff.
- b. The organization will have knowledgeable employees with the training and tools available to them to provide valuable input into the safety and health programs at all levels.
- 1) A system will be in place for employees to recognize and correct hazards within their control. Employees will be encouraged to report unsafe conditions beyond their control to correct without fear of reprisal, and work will be suspended until they are corrected. Reported hazards will be corrected or mitigated by management, and information feedback occurs.
 - 2) Lessons learned about recognized hazards will be shared servicewide and incorporated into future work and program activities.

Specific Outcomes

Implementing the strategies to achieve the desired condition will result in the following outcomes.

- a. Safety and health are integrated into all planning, design, and management processes. Failure to achieve safety and health are viewed as a failure of the management system, and corrective actions are taken without delay to correct these problems.
- b. Managers recognize the important link between effective safety and health efforts and overall program efficiency/effectiveness.
- c. Employees perceive that their supervisors deal appropriately with safety and health issues, and that management supports those efforts.
- d. All employees value their safety and health and that of their co-workers.
- e. All levels of the organization show their commitment to safety and health as a core value through their active, visible safety and health programs.

- f. Performance evaluations and program reviews will include appraisals of proactive safety and health program development and execution, rather than emphasis solely on accident statistics.

2. Communication

Desired Condition

Safety and Health awareness and information dissemination will be consistent throughout the Forest Service.

The Strategy

- a. The Chief's commitment to employee safety and health issues will be clarified and communicated.
- b. A communication plan for the vision and goals of the safety and health program will be developed and communicated agencywide.
- c. Management will seek innovative, cost-effective, and efficient methods for use of automation to inform employees, managers, and the public of safety and health issues and costs.
- d. All employees will be made aware of their rights and responsibilities under the Occupational Safety and Health Act.
- e. All supervisors and managers will be made aware of their role in and responsibility for implementation of the safety and health program under the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Specific Outcomes

Implementing the strategies to achieve the desired condition will result in the following outcomes.

- a. Employees, when equipped with knowledge of rights and responsibilities, will be more willing to identify hazards, propose corrective actions, and not take risks.
- b. Managers and supervisors will support the implementation of this strategic plan.
- c. Managers and supervisors will support hazard identification and correction.

3. Resources

Desired Condition

Safety and health efforts are integrated and coordinated in an effective manner. Safety and health issues always receive adequate support through a budget process that coordinates safety and health efforts.

The Strategy

- a. National program direction will ensure that a safety and health budget is included in the program budget planning process at all organization levels for each program/project area. Program budgets will ensure funding for hazard reduction abatement, and implementation of safety and health priorities.
- b. Budget advice will include safety and health as an integrated but still identifiable component for each program area.
- c. A resource program monitoring process will be developed to ensure that safety and health are incorporated into all project planning and that all projects are consistent with safety and health policy and direction. If there is insufficient funding to complete a project with all the requisite safety and health safeguards implemented, the project will not be initiated.
- d. The top priorities that the Safety and Health Council identifies each year will be funded nationally when approved by the National Leadership Team.
- e. National program management commitment to, support of, and interaction with the safety and health program will be enhanced by:
 - 1) Increasing the effectiveness and visibility of the safety and health program by enhancing the manager's accessibility to top management.
 - 2) Providing for a full-time, qualified safety and health manager at appropriate organizational levels.
 - 3) Requiring active safety and health committees at all Forest Service levels.

Specific Outcomes

Implementing the strategies to achieve the desired condition will result in the following outcomes.

- a. Staff directorates include safety and health elements as an integrated but still identifiable component in program budget advice (verified by safety and health manager).
- b. The availability of "real time" safety and health information increases awareness of emerging issues and ensures effective, timely implementation of a positive, proactive, integrated program.
- c. Safety and health concerns will be proactive and included as a requirement at the onset of projects and not after the fact.

4. Education

Desired Condition

Safety and health issues are incorporated in resource training. Training is delivered in a timely, coordinated, standard manner. An effective, appropriate safety and health program is consistently administered throughout the Forest Service through a standardized and comprehensive training curriculum, with standards identified for all levels based on employee roles and responsibilities.

The Strategy

- a. Employee training will be standardized and specific training curriculum modules will be developed and deployed (in partnership with Corporate Training) for both general safety and health issues and specific technical requirements.
- b. A minimum frequency for management and supervisory training and refresher training (e.g., every 1 or 2 years) will be established.
- c. Members of safety and health committees and union representatives will receive appropriate training.
- d. Collateral Duty Safety Officers and Safety Coordinators will receive training, including refresher training appropriate to their level of responsibility.
- e. Professional expertise in safety and health program managers will be developed by establishing a certification program, which includes continuing education and qualification requirements for safety and health professionals at the WO, Region, Station, Area, IITF, and local unit level.

Specific Outcomes

Implementing the strategies to achieve the desired condition will result in the following outcomes.

- a. Training programs continually emphasize employee safety and health awareness and encompass changing missions and employee concerns.
- b. Managers, supervisors, employees receive required training in a standardized, trackable, and recordable manner.
- c. Safety and health committees at all levels of the Forest Service are able to more effectively direct the progress of each unit's safety and health program.

5. Accountability

Desired Condition

Safety and health policy and expectations will be continually monitored through evaluation and data collection. Hazardous working conditions, work practices, and behaviors will be identified and corrected in a timely and efficient manner.

The Strategy

- a. Management will define roles and responsibilities for safety and health on a Washington Office, Regional, Forest, and District/Zone level by policy direction and by revision of the standard performance elements and position descriptions to include safety and health criteria for all employees, with additional responsibilities for supervisors and managers.
- b. Safety and health critical performance element(s) for managers and supervisors will include proactive, integrated, positive efforts to implement an effective program.
- c. The WO, Regions, Stations, Area, and IITF will conduct periodic integrated reviews to provide adequate oversight of the safety and health program. This information will be shared nationally.
- d. Servicewide accident, incident, and hazard and abatement reporting system will be established and implemented. It will include a database to collect, analyze, and communicate accident, incident, and hazard reporting and abatement information to managers, supervisors, and employees.
- e. Exceptional, proactive efforts by managers, supervisors, and employees will be reinforced through recognition and rewards.

Specific Outcomes

Implementing the strategies to achieve the desired condition will result in the following outcomes.

- a. The performance management system recognizes and rewards proactive safety and health performance.
- b. Managers and employees fulfill their responsibilities in a successful safety and health program.
- c. Availability of accurate, timely data ensures ability to measure progress toward hazard elimination servicewide and will help us become more effective and efficient in asset allocation.
- d. Management is aware and informed of the actual cost of accidents and the benefits of an aggressive, proactive, integrated safety and health culture.

CONCLUSION

Any goal and desired condition can be met only with the knowledge, cooperation, and commitment of those involved. In the case of health and safety, it is the responsibility of the entire workforce to seek knowledge and embrace cooperation and commitment, for the stakes are high: the ultimate well being of our employees and our visitors.

Once this strategic plan is approved by the DASHO and National Leadership Team, the Safety and Health Council will develop an action plan to accomplish the goals and strategies described in the plan. The action plan will be shared with all employees. The Safety and Health Council expects the process to be fluid, requiring a continual notification and education of managers, supervisors, and employees, and ensuring the use of employee feedback in future revisions to the plan.

"Think safety—in everything we do and everything we plan to do. I challenge you to consider the safety and health of our coworkers and customers when designing and implementing projects, to report and/or correct unsafe conditions, and to, at all times, communicate a strong safety and health message throughout the Forest Service."

Clyde Thompson

**Designated Agency Safety & Health Officer (DASHO)
Deputy Chief, Business Operations**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.