



As O’Neal President **Holman Head** said in his message on pages 2-3, continuous improvement has always been at the heart of O’Neal Steel’s culture. The emphasis on constantly striving for excellence – and looking for even better solutions to things the company already does well – originated with founder **Kirkman O’Neal** 90 years ago. But the importance of focusing on continuous improvement never gets old. In fact, from district to district and from one employee to the next, O’Neal is embracing the concept as a means of achieving not only higher quality and efficiency, but a safer work environment, too.

Accidents happen. They’re unintentional, and nobody likes them. But that doesn’t make them acceptable. Whether the cause was poor judgment, lack of attention, a flawed procedure, or a complete system breakdown, the fact that an accident happened is an indication of the need for improvement somewhere along the line. If that need is not addressed, the same or similar type of accident will most likely happen again – with the potential of putting people in danger and costing the company in numerous ways.

O’Neal has an excellent safety record and a safety program that’s constantly being refined and expanded. “Companywide, our OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) scores have improved significantly in the last several years,” said Corporate Safety Manager **Eric Worley**. “But the fact is, one accident is one too many. So

we’re creating a daily conversation about safety among managers, supervisors, and employees throughout the company... keeping it top-of-mind and top priority on a continuous basis.”

Pre-shift meetings are held at districts every day, and include discussion of safety issues. Once a month, there’s a meeting specifically devoted to safety. There are also safety committees that meet regularly, conduct district safety



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audits, and support management on the shop floor from day to day. On a broader scale, the President's Safety Council, which is more policy-driven, meets quarterly to review reports, address concerns as needed, and consider long-term issues.

One of the newer safety-related tools that was piloted at the Mobile District in late 2009, and has recently been implemented across all O'Neal districts, is a program developed by Liberty Mutual called "Managing Vital Performance" or "MVP." Rather than relying on end-of-month reports that serve as lagging performance indicators, MVP is a proactive approach to measuring how safe an operation is right now, based on current observations of conditions and behaviors that are vital to the safe completion of certain tasks. It teaches managers and supervisors to identify and

correct problems among Critical Work Activities as they occur – before they contribute to an accident – by providing immediate, specific, and constructive feedback to the individuals involved in the task.

Sometimes, an accident waiting to happen is very obvious. A worn cable, for example. Flammable materials stored near a heat source. Missing safety shields on machinery. As threatening as those kinds of things are, they're easy to spot and easy to fix. It's the not-so-obvious hazards or situations that require an even keener eye and understanding to identify. They may also require some innovative thinking to solve. That's where another recently implemented program at a number of O'Neal districts comes in.

"My CI" stands for "My Continuous Improvement," which is an individualized rewards program that encourages each and every warehouse employee at participating districts to work smarter and safer. "The best ideas come from the floor," said Eric. "The people doing a specific task know where the problems are; they're more likely to have ideas for workable solutions; and they're more likely to put their own ideas into practice."

My CI gives every warehouse employee at participating districts, such as Peru, Louisville, Indianapolis, and Houston, the continuous opportunity to solve problems in the workplace in order to make his or her job safer, easier, more efficient, or greener. "A clean and organized work area is probably about 75 percent of what makes a safe work area," said Eric – emphasizing the connection between safety and other types of improvement on the job. "My CI ties it all together, so it's a win-win."

There are basically four steps to My CI.

1. An employee identifies something that needs to be improved and develops a solution.
2. The idea is reviewed with the supervisor to make sure it fits the parameters of the program.
3. When the idea is approved and implemented, the supervisor writes up a brief description of the problem/solution and takes before and after photos, which are posted in one of four slots on the My CI board.
4. When all four slots are filled with implemented ideas, a drawing is held among those participants for a \$25 Wal-Mart gift card.

The Houston District's Warehouse Supervisor/Lean Specialist **James Roch** says the program has been a huge success there in a relatively short time. "In the past year, we've probably had 50 to 60 ideas submitted and put into practice. And every one of those has resulted in making someone's job safer, easier, faster, or greener," he said. "In addition to a chance at winning a gift card, employees like the recognition they receive and the fact that their creative and innovative thinking is noted in their review."

James said that ideas for successful improvements can range quite a bit in complexity. Houston's **Mike Pinkerton**, for example, came up with a way to organize, label, and store his laser nozzles, which saves him time whenever he needs to change one out. While Saw Operator **Bill Weiler** basically transformed an entire operation with his idea, and eliminated some potential safety concerns along the way.

Bill explained that he always had a hard time getting billet stock to his saw. He had to get with the forklift operator to bring him a few pieces at a time, then either use the crane himself or ask the material handler to load the stock on his saw. This took a lot of coordination, time, and effort every time he had to saw billets. So he moved the billets to where the welding Kan-Ban bins were located, which was right next to his saw. He then relocated the Kan-Ban bins to where they're used the most – next to the hand torches in Bay 5. This put the billet stock 300 feet closer to the saw and eliminated the need for the forklift and the material handler in the process. Now Bill says he's more efficient and doesn't have to spend time waiting on anyone else or coordinating several extra steps every time he needs to saw billets.

Eliminating those extra steps also undoubtedly reduced the risk of an accident each time material was being moved. The time and effort that Bill used to spend dealing with getting material transported the length of a football field had to have been at least somewhat distracting from his main focus as a saw operator. But a commitment to continuous improvement solved that problem, and the operation is safer as a result.

As Vice President of Operations **Mitchell Harrison** said, "Safety, Lean, and continuous improvement all have overlapping benefits. By working smarter, you also work safer." And if you accept the fact that there's always room for improvement, you can see why O'Neal never stops striving to find new and better ways to create an accident-free work environment for everyone. Continuous improvement means continuously safer. 🍌

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