



## Why Take Safety in the Workplace Seriously?

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In today's increasingly competitive global environment, survival of companies requires improved performance and growth. Within our Caribbean context of small, fragile economies, this reality is further magnified. In our quest to achieve these objectives however, business leaders must be willing to adapt their strategies to harness the existing potential in their organisations. Enhanced application of sound risk management principles can assist in this regard as well as encompass the moral, legal and financial implications associated with workplace safety.

While some business leaders express a desire or commitment to preventing serious injuries and deaths among employees, they are often challenged by the trade-off between achieving financial targets and the expenditures required to maintain a safe workplace.

Let us therefore examine the benefits to be derived from a simple change in perspective. Rather than viewing expenditure associated with OSH initiatives as an unwanted but necessary cost, consider the money spent as investments towards improved performance, growth and sustainability.

Throughout our region, as well as in the US and Europe, there have been multiple instances of safety system failures which have occurred as a result of the pressure to reduce expenditures and increase profits. These decisions have led to delays in critical maintenance and repairs of equipment, postponement or suspension of training, and neglect of critical proactive monitoring activities, such as risk assessments and inspections. The end result has been incidents involving injuries and / or death, as well as damage to critical costly pieces of equipment. There are significant costs associated with each of these outcomes. This however, does not have to be our continued story. Companies can be successful, while simultaneously embracing Safety as a Core Value. It begins with the perspective that ALL workplace accidents are preventable. More importantly, it is rooted in an organisation-wide understanding that profitability, operational excellence, and resilience, are intimately linked to

sound and consistent safety management practices. So, where do we start?

### 1. At the top

The most senior officer within the organisation must demonstrate visible commitment to the safety and well-being of all stakeholders. i.e. Make safety the #1 priority in your organisation! Don't only speak it – Live it! Lead by example and be consistent. Hold members of your management team accountable for safety actions. In so doing, a clear message is sent regarding expectations of everyone. Leaders should take the time to walk their company facilities and engage employees at all levels to hear directly from them about any safety concerns. You may be surprised how much can be learned. This should not only translate into greater ownership by staff for their actions at work, but also a greater commitment to working towards the company's goals and objectives. Be sincere and ensure conversations are focused on them, rather than the profitability of the company.

### 2. Incorporate Safety into Operations

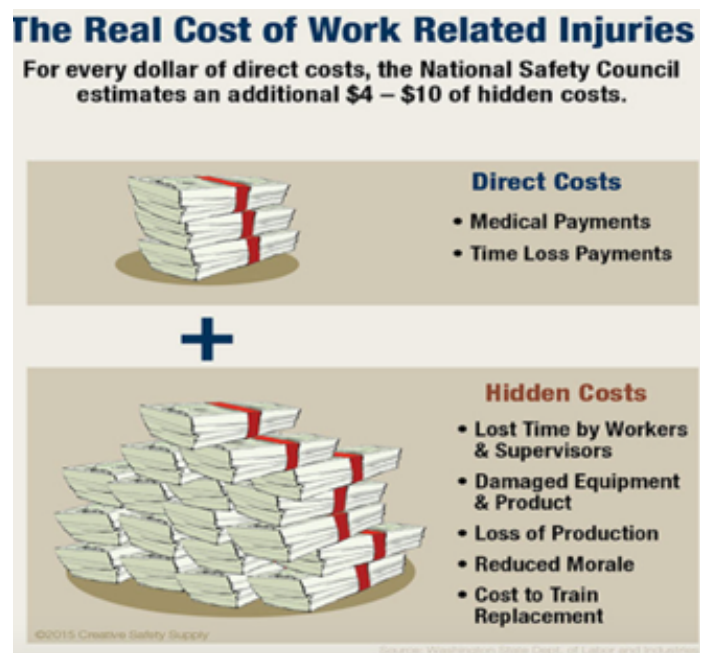
They are not mutually exclusive! Around the world, the safest, most successful companies, have incorporated safety into their business processes. They have done so because, it was recognised that a deterioration in safety, directly manifests in reductions in product quality and customer service. Such outcomes, are consistent with management theories which posit the views, that employees who don't feel safe at work, are unlikely to execute their tasks well. By incorporating safety into operations, standardisation and uniformity in process activities is fostered and consistently applied. This is increasingly achieved when employees have been part of the development process. Additionally, they will hold each other far more accountable and feel more invested in the business. Further, research conducted by Fortune 500 companies has confirmed that top talent, customers and businesses seeking strategic partnerships, are increasingly likely to choose companies which demonstrate a strong sense of

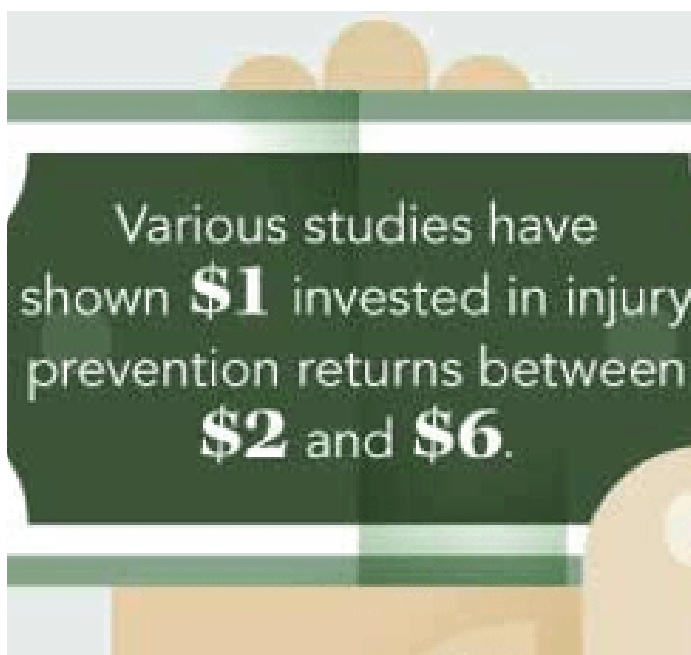
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which includes progressive safety, health and environmental management practices.

### 3. Understand the Impact of Incidents

Take the time to implement systems which will record and track not only instances of workplace accidents, but the cost of these incidents – both the direct and hidden costs as illustrated in Fig 1 below. (Source: National Safety Council)

**Fig 1. The Real Cost of Work-Related Injuries**





**Fig 2. The ROI of Safety**

Review these costs in the context of reputational risk and the possible negative outcomes with stakeholders. Conversely, consider the benefits derived from investments in safety and health, which result in a reduction in the frequency of incidents and the severity of the outcome, consequently making more funds available to grow the business as illustrated in Fig 2 above. (Source: National Safety Council)

Such information can be used to leverage your organisations when negotiating business contracts, as your risk exposure is diminished and employee morale and engagement are higher.

#### **4. Consider the Overall Benefits**

Tangible results in the short to medium term are considered attainable, as all employees become aware and take ownership for health and safety actions.

This fosters teamwork and accountability at all levels. Recognition programmes can be implemented to further enhance the commitment to safety goals and objectives. Further, long-term profitability can also be achieved, as integration of best practices across operations should result in greater efficiency, improved productivity, reduced expenses and a motivated workforce.

At the end of 2019, the Minister of Labour and Social Partnership Relations expressed concern about the lack of focus on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) initiatives and systems, in Barbados' businesses. With plans to introduce Regulations associated with The Safety and Health at Work Act. Cap. 356, there is likely to be an increase in enforcement actions taken by the respective agencies, to drive improved levels of compliance. So, if you are still asking why safety in the workplace should be taken seriously, the answer is simple- as a Leader - Integrity matters. Show that you care, it's the right thing to do.

