Safety Reward Programs

Across this nation a majority of companies, government agencies, and corporations use some kind of safety incentive program to motivate employees.   Safety incentive programs are fairly easy to develop and start, but the challenge is to keep the program viable and running.   The debate within our industry cost versus a substantial and long-term impact in reducing accidents in the workplace ?   Most of us feel that incentives are an essential tool to any organization, regardless its size but that is not the whole story !

In an article by Ron Prichard, P.E Ph.D., he states that crafting as effective safety incentive program has five critical steps.

1. **Have a properly functioning, and complete, safety program.** A safety incentive is just one part of an effective safety program. It is no panacea for an inadequate safety management process nor can it replace any other part of a safety program
2. **Examine safety performance within the organization.** If accidents are higher than average, the safety program is either not working properly or is failing in implementation. Corrections must be made to reduce injuries prior to considering an incentive program.
3. **Gain management support and proactive participation.** If management does not believe in the safety incentive program and stand behind it, neither will employees. Workers must believe the program is fair, it will be properly administered, and that they have a shot at actually winning achieving the reward. If not, the workers will not support the program. They must have trust, and this is best accomplished through an active and strong management presence and role.
4. **Structure the incentive program.** Set goals, select rewards, and develop the administrative process. The goals are important because if set too high (such as an all-or-nothing approach), early failure will discourage participation; if too low, there is no effort required (thus, no change in actions) to gain the rewards. Goals must be clearly defined and easily measured. Rewards should be tailored to fit the workforce. If not, it's unlikely the incentive program would motivate anyone. The rewards must have value to the workers, not management. The power of money is strong, however, many other things, such as gift certificates or time off, can be just as powerful (if not more so, under the right circumstances).
5. **Ensure effective communication about the program as it is implemented.** Workers need to understand why the program is being implemented, the rules, how it works, and how progress is measured. They need to be continually reminded about the incentive program, the reasons for it, and how they are doing. They need to see management involvement and support, through active participation and coaching.

The primary concerns with incentive programs is that you are paying your team to develop behaviors by means of "Bribery" !   The long-term benefit and goal of an effective safety programs should be to develop and change the culture of your organization, not bribe a worker. When the staff of the organization feels that a safe working environment is a daily and accepted standard, then you will see a real impact to your accident prevention.   This is the "Holy Grail" of an effective Safety Programs and has to be embraced at all levels of the organization. It must be maintained on a DAILY basic and used to cultivate, build and promote the safe working environment, so that the rewards become the secondary motivation and not the primary motivation.