

Safety at UPS

*Employee ownership & management
commitment drive success*

By Sue Trebswether, PS Editor

ASK AN SH&E PRACTITIONER what drives superior safety performance, and you'll likely hear that management commitment and employee involvement are critical. Without visible support from management, employees don't get a clear message that safety is important, leaving SH&E programs to languish and produce mediocre results at best.

But how do you develop these components? How do you get managers to "walk the talk"? How do you get employees interested—and keep them interested? If the key-issues roundtables at ASSE's Safety 2003 Conference in Denver were any indication, there are many different ideas—from accountability measures to behavior-based safety initiatives and incentive-laden programs.

Throughout all the discussions, though, one theme emerged: The safety philosophy must start at the top, then cascade down through management and employee ranks. That's the approach at United Parcel Service (UPS). From CEO Mike Eskew down to part-time ramp workers, safety is valued at the Atlanta-based corporation. In essence, it's institutionalized. "At UPS, safety is not seen as a program," explains Keith Jones, director of corporate safety and health, "it's part of the culture. When you come on board, it's part of the learning experience." In a firm that employs more than 360,000 people and moves more than 13 million packages daily, it's also no small feat.

A Foundation for Safety

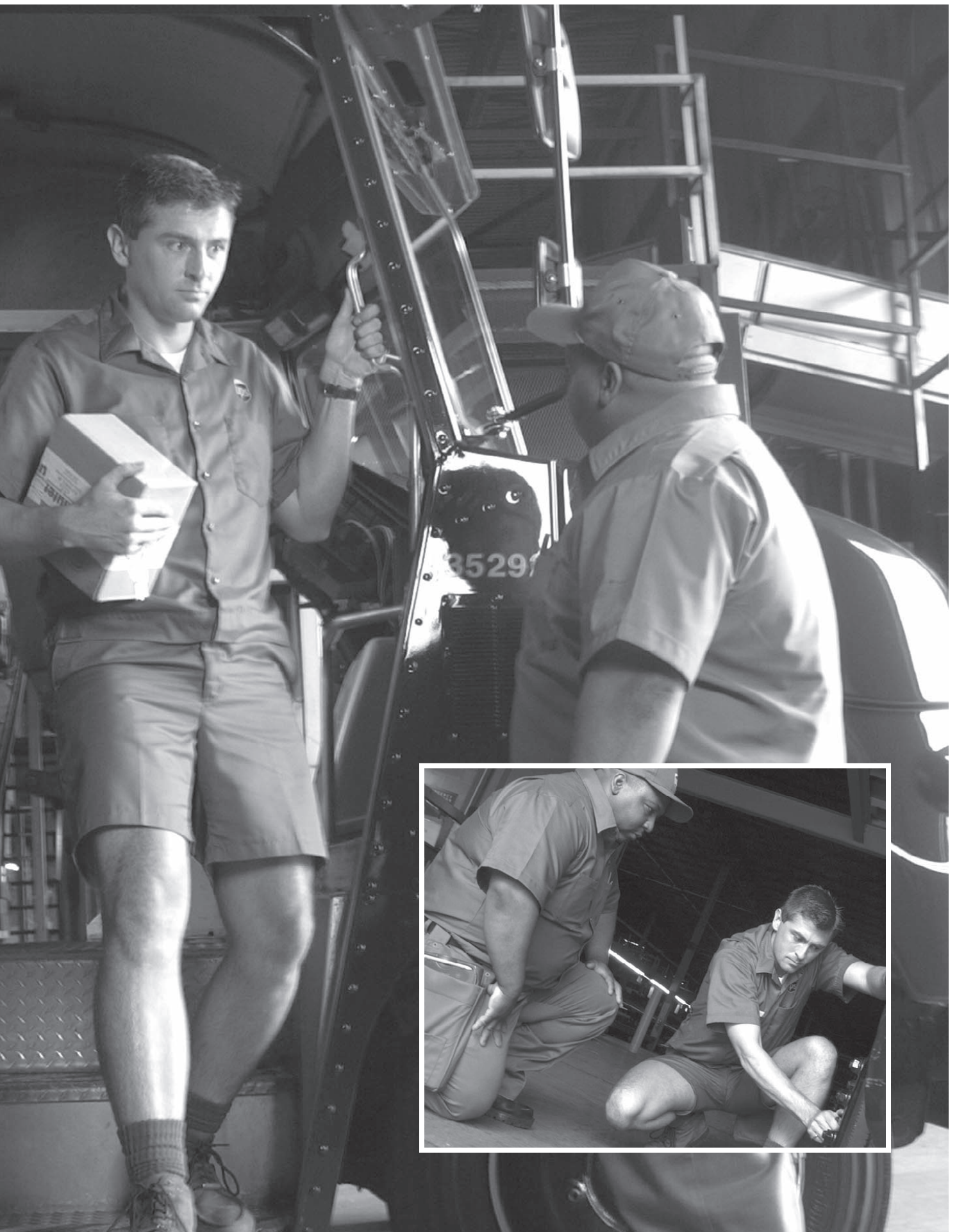
Safety has long been part of the UPS operating philosophy. In 1917, UPS drivers received their first defensive driving handbook. Today, all drivers complete the firm's Space and Visibility defensive driving course where they learn the "five seeing habits." Its 85,000 drivers log more than 2 billion miles a year—while experiencing less than one accident for every million miles driven.

Early on, the company also instituted a safe driving Honor Roll to recognize accident-free drivers. It's a program that continues today, and includes the Safe Driving Hall of Fame (for drivers with 20 or more years of safe driving) and the Circle of Honor (for those drivers with 25 years of safety behind the wheel), which has nearly 3,200 active members.

The company's long tradition of training translates into an investment today of \$38 million per year. Employees receive 1.3 million hours of safety training each year, covering topics such as defensive driving, accident investigation, hazard communication, respiratory protection, hearing conservation, conveyor safety, lockout/tagout and workplace violence. Employees also participate in the firm's HABITS (Health, Athleticism, Body Mechanics, Inspect, Tools and Equipment and Safety Compliance) program, which teaches them how to bend, lift and pivot safely. "Training is a strength at UPS," explains Dan Norman, man-



CHSP cochair Rick Green demonstrates handrail use and package car safety inspection.



ager of the company's Comprehensive Health and Safety Process (CHSP). "We focus on teaching our people how to do their jobs, their processes in the safest manner possible."

Safety measures are also part of the company's overall evaluation process—and part of each manager's quality performance review, which impacts their merit-based pay. As CEO Mike Eskew noted in a recent interview, "Safety is just a slogan if it doesn't come from the top and if it doesn't have some teeth."

Employee Ownership at Work

•**Hodgkins, IL:** The twilight sort at the Chicago Area Consolidation Hub achieved a 46-percent reduction in OSHA-recordable injuries using the SWEEP (Safety While Evaluating, Education and Preventing) program. SWEEP groups monitor work area safety, assist with safety training and provide recognition for safe work practices. The group distributed cards that were later used in a raffle for VIP parking at the facility.

•**Pacific Region:** The safety committee in the Pacific Region's Desert Mountain District and the Automotive group in the South California District created a device that counts the number of times a package car is placed in reverse. The counters spurred a contest to see which package division could achieve the greatest reduction in total backing maneuvers.

•**Syracuse, NY:** The automotive CHSP committee developed a tool to check clearance on bench grinders in UPS facilities, along with a poster to educate employees on how to safely operate the devices.

•**Ottuma, IA:** As part of an effort to enhance awareness and safety, retirees were asked to join the safety committee and share their knowledge.

•**Willow Grove, PA:** The feeder CHSP group suggested several design enhancements to the tractor-trailer dolly (connection device between a set of double trailers) to make it easier and safer to maneuver the device. The improvements were later implemented companywide.

committee regarding what to work on, how, when. Through CHSP, we put safety in the hands of our nonmanagement people and said, 'Here run with it.'"

The results suggest they did just that. Between December 1996 and June 2001, UPS reduced its lost workday injury and illness frequency by 49 percent while its OSHA-recordable injuries dropped 45 percent. The CHSP process also helped reduce automo-

tive accident frequencies by 16 percent between 1997 and 2001. "Every improvement that we've seen in the last six years has been because of [CHSP committees]," Norman adds. "Certainly there's been strong management support, but these improvements would not have happened if these nonmanagement folks had not taken ownership of their environments and wanted themselves and their peers to return home just as they went to work."

Currently, more than 2,400 CHSP committees are active nationwide, each with at least five members. Membership is voluntary and the process gives each committee a great deal of autonomy. "We gave them the shell," Norman explains. "They fit it to their needs." And it's that site ownership that infuses the process with credibility, according to Keith Jones. "Through CHSP, we get our people in the mix and ask them to tell us what's the best way—tell us, rather than have us [management] dictate," he says. "Another great thing about having nonmanagement people involved in the safety process is that peers will lean on each other [to improve] their safety performance. This ownership alleviates the need for management to get involved in that respect."

Involved Employees

Talk to employees within the CHSP process and you'll hear the enthusiasm and pride that grows from that involvement. Rick Green, a package car driver and CHSP cochair at his facility, explains, "Everybody likes to be on a winning team. If you can fuel that positiveness within the workgroup through CHSP, your results will follow." He also lauds the face-to-face element of CHSP. "Employees know the committee members and know they can come to us. That's the trust we develop as we interact with them daily on various issues." As a result, he says, the process has much more credibility, which drives positive outcomes.

It also means employees are more open when committee members point out hazards and concerns—whether it's making sure that drivers use the handrail to enter/exit a package car, use a handcart to lift over-70s or avoid at-risk behaviors. "Through CHSP we add a personal approach," Green says. "When you can give them a reason why they need to take a certain action or do some task a certain way—'This is what it's going to do for you'—that's when CHSP really works." By preventing injuries or reducing their severity through the process of continuous training, monitoring and feedback, "you've taken a huge step," he observes.

The process helps build positive attitudes about safety for all involved. "We want to make sure everyone is successful," explains Natalie Goethe, an eight-year UPSer and CHSP cochair at her facility. "We stress the positive and try to give everyone a good feeling about safety." That applies to committee members as well, she observes. "We're more positive and we always feel we want to do even better." Adds Green, "Committee members work even safer because we have to lead by example."

The Push Toward Excellence

Its safety tradition notwithstanding, the company realized in 1995 that it needed to do more. "Our workplace health and safety process mirrored our traffic and driving safety process, which are very successful," Norman explains. "But it didn't work as well in the workplace. We needed to develop a process that would drive the results we needed." The result was CHSP.

At its core are the CHSP committees—nonmanagement employees (drivers and package handlers) who conduct facility and equipment audits, perform work practice and behavior analyses, conduct training, and recommend process and equipment changes. The committees are supported by a management cochair.

CHSP required a complete culture change for the corporation. "Health and safety committees were nothing new at UPS," Norman says. "The difference was that in the past, management owned the process, directing the com-

The positive attitude toward safety is perpetuated by an accident/injury investigation process that focuses on prevention, not finger pointing. "When we start the process, we stress that we want to prevent similar incidents from happening again," says Green. Information learned during the investigation can then be shared—not only with the individual involved, but with the entire workgroup. "Awareness is such a key," he explains. And thanks to that approach, employees recognize that "it's all about caring, about giving them the extra individual attention they might need so they don't keep getting injured," Goethe states.

CHSP committees also bring employee safety concerns and issues to management, which gives managers a chance to visibly demonstrate their commitment to safety. "You ask for something and [management] responds," Goethe says. "That's what's most rewarding. When you feel like someone is in your corner and it's your boss, it makes you feel not only empowered, it makes you feel valuable and that's important."

The committees also conduct facility audits every six months—yet another way for the groups to take safety ownership and for management to show its commitment. "Once employees see tangible things being corrected, they realize, 'Hey, that really cost a lot of money to do, but they did it,'" Green notes. "That's when you get the enthusiasm."

The CHSP process has become a conduit for information exchange throughout the corporation as well. Best practices, training ideas, safety tips and a range of other safety-related information is regularly shared during CHSP cochair conferences, driver conference calls and PowerPoint presentations, and via website links. "We're able to learn and adapt what other groups have done to address a problem our facility may be experiencing," Green states. Goethe adds, "Through CHSP, we're constantly getting a greater depth of knowledge and information that we can use to solve problems."

Getting Behind Employees

With employees doing audits, assessing work practices and encouraging safety, management's role becomes that of offering support and insight, and ensuring that CHSP committees have the resources they need. "The support from top management—from our CEO on down—amplifies how much we support the process and support what our committees are doing," Norman says.

Evidence of that support is readily found. For example, UPS management looks for creative ways to recognize employee safety efforts. The company published a list of its safe drivers in a full-page ad in *USA Today*; has sent drivers to NASCAR races; and sent workers to the Olympics when the event was



held in Atlanta. "We don't look at these things as incentives," Jones says, "but as recognition—a sincere thank you."

UPS also frequently invests in engineering improvements designed to improve a work process or work environment. For example, following a union request that UPS install devices to help drivers see at the rear of their vehicles, the company partnered with Liberty Mutual to conduct extensive research on rear-sight devices. As a result, rear-vision cameras have since been installed on all 85,000 delivery trucks. "Although it was more expensive for us to install these devices on our vehicles, it was the best tool available for our people," Norman says. Other innovations, such as no-lift sort areas, and articulated load/unload devices, were implemented to help keep packages in an employee's power zone. The familiar brown delivery trucks continue to improve as well, with lower steps and automatic transmission among the many recent improvements.

Top to bottom, the investment in safety is paying off at UPS. "Safety is a corporate advantage," Jones concludes. "When our people are safe and on the job—rather than home injured—we can better serve our customers. Many corporations simply haven't connected the dots that by improving safety you will improve the bottom line. Many see safety as an expense rather than as an investment that will pay great dividends." ■

Through the CHSP process, committee members are able to deliver face-to-face communication about safety on a regular basis. That builds credibility and trust, which lead to greater involvement and positive results.