Poor Safety Culture Blamed for New York Train Crashes

After the Metro-North Railroad, which operates in New York and Connecticut, had five incidents within a year that killed six people and injured 126, the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board conducted a special investigation.

The NTSB released a summary of its special investigation report, which found, among other things, that Metro-North's safety culture was lacking and contributed to these fatal incidents. (An investigation by Canada's Transportation Safety Board into the tragic train derailment at Lac-Mégantic, Québec came to similar conclusions about the safety culture of the railroad involved in that incident.)

Specifically, the NTSB found that:

- Metro-North didn't effectively use its System Safety Program Plan or Priority One Program for their intended purposes of providing guidance for managing the safety of its operations and employees.
- The Safety and Security Department was ineffective in identifying and resolving operational or process safety issues across its departments.
- The organizational structure of Metro-North and its safety programs didn't support effective safety risk management of all its departments and functions.
- Metro-North didn't effectively investigate accidents and incidents, and address known deficiencies to continuously improve and revise processes to prevent recurrences.
- The railroad didn't have an effective system for identifying, monitoring, analyzing and mitigating safety risks.
- Metro-North didn't have an effective program that encouraged all employees to report safety issues and observations.
- Metro-North lacked an effective oversight and enforcement program to ensure that employees and managers understand and comply with established safety procedures.
- Managers often lacked the ability to effectively conduct audits, operational testing processes and safety risk management actions as

described in the Metro-North Railroad System Safety Program Plan.

How would your company's safety culture fare if it was subjected to such an in-depth investigation' Use this checklist to assess your safety culture.

Here are a few additional OHS Insider resources that can help you improve your safety culture:

- 9 elements of a robust safety culture
- Brief Senior Management: Safety Culture Comes from the Top Down.