

# White Paper Shows How to Successfully Use Leading Indicators



The National Safety Council's Campbell Institute has been studying leading indicators to help more organizations take advantage of their predictive power. (See this article on a prior study by the Institute on using leading indicators to measure your EHS performance.)

The Institute defines leading indicators as proactive, preventive and predictive measures to identify and eliminate risks and hazards in the workplace that can cause incidents and injuries.

As part of its research, the Campbell Institute released a new white paper, *Elevating EHS Leading Indicators: From Defining to Designing*, which describes how eight organizations used leading indicators and the lessons they learned along the way. (You can download the paper below.)

Five common themes and lessons arose among the Institute participants:

## **1. Leverage What's Already Being Measured**

Don't reinvent the wheel. Take an inventory of all your existing indicators to see what might work well. For example, Schneider Electric started looking at safety training hours because it was already measuring these hours.

## **2. Don't Waste Time Deliberating**

It may seem overwhelming to start a leading indicators program, so start with a very small program. Don't waste time trying to find the 'perfect' leading indicator, because it doesn't exist. You really won't know the true value of an indicator until you give it a chance. Knowing that most leading indicators will have to be adjusted in the future makes it even more practical to just begin somewhere.

For example, Cummins, Inc. started small by tracking OHS assessments and corrective/preventive actions. The main reason for choosing these two indicators was that this data was readily available at the site level and worksites wouldn't be burdened by gathering additional information.

## **3. Track Meaningful and Actionable Information**

Leading indicators should provide a clear path forward on how to improve safety. Over time, Schneider Electric realized that merely tracking training hours wasn't as predictive as it had been at the beginning. So they shifted their focus to instead track the effectiveness of training by periodically quizzing employees in the months following the training. As a result, they found that retention of training information was more indicative of injuries and near misses.

#### **4. Get Leadership Support**

Leadership support for using leading indicators is critical. Ideally, the mandate comes from senior management, as it was for Johnson Controls and ExxonMobil. But this isn't always the case. A couple of participants noted that getting buy-in from different parts of the organization (management, HR, frontline workers, engineers, etc.) required speaking 'different languages' to appeal to their unique needs.

#### **5. Integrate Leading Indicators into the OHS Program**

Several organizations mentioned that for leading indicators to be truly effective, they must be integrated into the overall safety management system and not treated as a separate program. That's why Johnson Controls includes EHS leading indicators as an important component of its global maturity model for improving business excellence and why every research participant tracks leading indicators at the corporate level.