

Editor's Notebook

By Sandy Smith, Editor

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, SUSTAINABLE SAFETY AND GOING GREEN

The steps to achieving sustainable development are not so different from those taken to reach sustainable safety.

Why safety professionals should be offered a seat at the environmentalists' table.

I called Fay Feeney, CSP, ARM, last month to talk about behavioral safety. While she said she was happy to address that topic with me, she said she had another matter she'd prefer to discuss: sustainability and the greening of business and why safety professionals should be involved. Since Fay Feeney is one of the most intelligent people I know, I decided I wanted to hear what she had to say.

After almost 20 years working with Fortune 100 clients in the loss prevention and engineering department of Travelers Insurance, Fay launched Envision Strategic Group, which provides risk management and human resource services to businesses wanting to enhance their operational excellence and actively manage their business risk. Her customers include Comcast Entertainment Group, the Screen Actor's Guild, Kingston Technology, THQ Inc., NipponKoa Insurance Co. and Disneyland Resort.

As a CSP, Feeney has focused much of her consulting practice on risk management and safety. And as a safety professional, she continued to ask herself: What's next?

Feeney came to the conclusion that as a safety professional and a risk manager, the next logical step for her was sustainability, which, as Feeney defines it, is "economic development that takes full account of the environmental consequences of economic activity and is based on the use of resources that can be replaced or renewed and therefore are not depleted." Feeney, after doing her homework, is positioning herself as an advisor to private and public corporate boards, providing them with information about sustainability and how it can improve governance, profitability and brand reputation.

"The trend [for business] is toward greening," says Feeney, "And our environmental health and safety experience is an appropriate expertise to bring to that discussion." For example:

EHS managers continually look for ways to sustain and build upon safety performance. The best ones refuse to accept the status quo and have no interest in average safety performance. They tinker with programs and processes until maximum performance is achieved, and then start thinking about and developing and sustaining better safety performance and processes. The same is true of greening, says Feeney.

Greening "starts at the top to improve the bottom line," she says. Just as with the best safety management programs, culture change has to be championed by upper management.

Companies across the United States have safety processes that range from the bare minimum – those held together with duct tape and prayers – to award-winning (see next month's issue for the list of the 2007 America's Safest Companies for

examples of stellar safety achievement). Similarly, companies are all over the place in their greening efforts. Some are proud of the fact they recycle soda cans, while others use solar power to operate equipment and plant sod on their roofs to provide insulation from heat and cold to curb energy use.

Some companies have had safety as a prerequisite for conducting business since their doors opened. For others, safety is a new concept. According to Feeney, acceptance of greening "is spread out like any business continuum. Some companies have been doing it for a while, like energy companies. They have firmly established policies. At GE, for example, its part of their business strategy, while at the vast majority of companies, there is a 'wait and see' attitude."

Many companies use a great safety record and program to attract employees. "There is not a college campus that isn't using environmental policies to attract students," says Feeney. "Greening, like safety, is seen as something that is good and good for you." In addition, she says, "Greening has positive opportunities to reduce costs [and] improve your work environments by improving lighting, air quality and comfort. These will help you attract and retain talent in the 21st century marketplace." Sounds like it has a lot in common with a good safety program, Feeney points out.

Finally, says Fay, safety managers must think through the implications of process or product changes, and the impact they will have on employees and the safety process. "There has not been much discussion [of the impact of greening] on people," says Fay. "The discussion mostly has been about the impact of greening on the environment. As a business, from the client side and the employee side, there are double returns to greening. There is a cost reduction, and there's the opportunity to improve your reputation."

Managers, she says, are beginning to think about greening in business terms: Will they be at a competitive disadvantage if they don't do it?

"Greening is a trend that is not going away. Without a business strategy you will be at a competitive disadvantage," she cautions, adding, "Don't be left behind."



FAY FEENEY, CSP, ARM
PRINCIPAL

Envision STRATEGIC GROUP

T 310.372.0591
F 310.372.0582
E FAY@123SAFETY.COM
W WWW.123SAFETY.COM