



Safety Equipment Purchasing

...Selecting the Right Vendor

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All businesses devote resources to selecting and communicating with their suppliers for the materials that directly impact their delivery of an end product or service. The supplier representatives become partners in the effort to keep your company competitive. It is likely that you know your sales people by name, face, phone number, and the vehicle they drive.

Now, consider how much time you have spent selecting the vendor for your safety supplies. Who in your organization makes that decision? Many employers take for granted that the same supplier who provides their office supplies, light bulbs, or building materials is also capable of supporting their safety needs. Unfortunately, the safety industry has many specialized products that are misused, misunderstood, or misidentified because vendors simply “ship what the customer ordered.” Industrial and equipment suppliers frequently offer safety gear as a sideline or as an “impulse” buy when customers come into the store or browse the catalog for other items.

Your safety gear should not be an impulse buy. Below are some points to consider when selecting the vendor who impacts your overhead, not just directly with the cost of equipment, but indirectly in insurance and employee productivity as well.

- ✓ Do they offer a variety of products within the same line? Just like there are varying qualities of drills you buy, there are differences in the types of hardhats or glasses your employees wear. What accessories does the vendor offer for the products they sell? Would you buy cut-off saws from somebody who doesn't sell the blades? Why buy fall arrest harnesses from somebody who doesn't carry the anchor straps to secure them? Is the vendor willing to provide samples of their products so you can “field test” them?

- ✓ Can the sales representative offer technical assistance for application of the equipment? Does the sales representative provide suggestions or solutions to specific problems? Would you even think about calling them for help? For example, when selecting traffic vests for your employees, a vendor with diverse product lines can make the difference between productive and comfortable employees and tangled irritated employees.
- ✓ Does your safety vendor keep you updated on the latest safety equipment that impacts your business? There are constant evolutions in personal protective equipment, fall protection, and other equipment that impacts your productivity. Nobody likes a sales representative who constantly tries to up-sell everything, but a conscientious vendor can help keep you ahead of your competitors and create a positive work environment for your employees.
- ✓ Is the vendor accessible and well stocked with the products you need? Are they willing to keep a supply of your most critical or longest-lead items? Since most people responsible for purchasing safety equipment wear many hats, it is not uncommon for the safety supply closet to run low before somebody notices. Your vendor can save you lots of aspirin by having what you need when you need it.

These are just a few of the considerations about an aspect of your safety program that is often overlooked. *Shouldn't the products that help keep your employees safe get at least the same level of consideration as the materials those employees use to complete your mission?* Establishing contact with a good safety vendor will greatly enhance your ability to implement and maintain the safety culture within your workforce.