

**2016 Safety Award Entry**  
**Best Safety Innovation**  
**Atlantic County Utilities Authority**



**ACUA's 2015 Safety Culture Initiative**

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The year 2015 was a banner year for safety at the Atlantic County Utilities Authority. Atlantic County Utilities Authority, known locally as ACUA, serves more than 100,000 homes and businesses, and employs more than 200 people. Its Solid Waste Division includes a state of the art landfill, recycling center, transfer station, compost facility, collections department, and vehicle maintenance shop to care for our fleet of over 100 vehicles. A major goal of the organization has been to improve the overall safety culture. To accomplish this, ACUA began a Safety Culture Initiative that consists of increased training programs, such as the Safety Minute, Safety Shadowing and Safety Selfies.

The first new component of the Safety Culture Initiative implemented was the Safety Minute. The Safety Minute is a written safety message that is published weekly on our intranet, *insideACUA*, and takes about one minute to read. The message varies depending on the week, the weather, current events and trends. The Safety Minute was first posted in October 2014 during the testing phase. The posts received positive feedback, and ACUA continued the program into 2015. The Safety Minute incorporates and utilizes information from SWANA's Safety Monday. To ensure the message gets to every employee, we share it both electronically and physically by printing and posting copies in common area bulletin boards.

The second component of the Safety Culture Initiative is something we call Safety Shadowing. The Safety/Risk Coordinator conducts Safety Shadows, where she spends an entire shift shadowing various employees in their jobs. For example, the Safety/Risk Coordinator may spend a shift on the trucks with employees in our Collections Department, with the mechanics in our Fleet and Facilities Department, with the overnight landfill team or with the employees in the Transfer Station. The goal is to experience what the employee experiences, deal with the

conditions the employee deals with on a daily basis and make observations using an eye for safety. The Safety Shadow gives us the opportunity to observe employees in their environment, identify facts, not faults, and positively reinforce safe practices and behaviors while determining areas that might benefit from additional training. This time spent with the employees is valuable and critical in improving the overall safety culture of the organization. The interpersonal relationship between the safety coordinator and the employee becomes strengthened, and therefore, employees are more likely to report safety issues as they feel more comfortable doing so.

The third and most fun component of the Safety Culture Initiative is the Safety Selfie. In 2015, ACUA made training courses a priority and increased the number of courses available. To showcase employees' participation, employees are encouraged to take Safety Selfies after completing training. Employees are also encouraged to submit photos of others performing an act that promotes safety. Of course, employees must only take photographs in safe conditions! Safety Selfies are posted on *insideACUA* as a fun and contemporary safety reminder. To add to the excitement, we often post these on our social media sites, which is an added motivator, and friends, family and community members can enjoy.

ACUA has begun measuring the effects of the Safety Culture Initiative and one quantifiable



result has been a 32 percent reduction in modified duty hours from 2014 to 2015. While it is too early to determine total losses for workers compensation claims year over year, we are confident that reduced light duty and reduced lost time will add to a decrease in the total claim cost. We will be better able to determine the effects of the Safety Culture Initiative in 2016 and 2017, when claims have completely matured. We are currently using our OSHA 300 reporting as a metric and are comparing based on calendar year, but in order to accurately assess, we will need to have a greater look back period as some claims are still open.

ACUA now encourages the reporting of all incidents regardless of how small as well as near-misses so they can be properly investigated in order to prevent further or more serious incidents. This new reporting model has skewed results with regard to the number of claims in 2015 since there will be more claims reported. However, we anticipate that the severity, and ultimately, the number of lost time, time on modified duty and cost of claim will be decreased. The most important aspect of this is that the focus is truly on safety. Reporting all incidents and near misses increases the number of reported claims, but ultimately, if everyone goes home safely, that is a metric we are willing to sacrifice.

The proactive approach ACUA has taken to safety in 2015 with the Safety Culture Initiative has shown great outcomes immediately, and its true results will be in the years to come. ACUA is thrilled with financial results that are quantifiable, but enhancing relationships between employees and management to increase safety is the true goal of ACUA's Safety Culture Initiative. We believe we are on the right track as we continue our Safety Culture Initiative for 2016, which will include revamping Safety Committee meetings and working towards becoming an OSHA Merit site. Winning an award such as this one would reaffirm our commitment to the

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hard work that we have put in with regard to safety at ACUA, and perhaps, by showcasing our Safety Culture Initiatives, we will be able to assist others in the industry.