

A man in a maroon shirt is leaning over a table, gesturing with his hands as if presenting or explaining something. He is looking towards a woman in a red top who is sitting at the table and looking at a laptop. The background is a bright, modern office setting with large windows.

# SELLING OFF-THE-JOB SAFETY

Convincing employers  
and employees to 'buy in'

By Kyle W. Morrison, associate editor

**Y**our safety program at work is top-notch. Your employee injury rates on the job have been steadily decreasing thanks to efforts to better educate and protect workers. Maybe your company was even honored by OSHA or the National Safety Council for its efforts to keep employees safe at work.

When it comes to a safe work environment, both your CEO and employees “get it.” But what about when employees go home?

Statistically, workers are more likely to be injured off the job than on. “There’s a real problem here – we’re safer at work than at home,” said Donna Stein-Harris, executive director of the National Safety Council’s Home and Communities Partnerships and Initiatives.

How can upper management be convinced that protecting workers off the job is just as important – if not more so – as protecting workers on the job? Furthermore, how can employees be convinced to care what a boss might have to say about an environment in which he or she has no control?

“There’s a real problem here — we’re safer at work than at home.”

Donna Stein-Harris,  
National Safety Council

In short, how can one “sell” off-the-job safety?

**Know your workers**

The concept of off-the-job safety may be difficult for a safety professional to sell to employers because there is no “Off-the-Job OSHA.” This makes it easy for an employer to believe his or her responsibilities toward employees stop when they walk out the company door. “It’s much more challenging,” said Philip Chancellor, CSP and CIH. “It is difficult to sell. There’s no rule that says you have to do this.”

For nearly two years, Chancellor has been the global off-the-job safety lead for St. Louis-based Monsanto Corp.’s environmental, health and safety group. He said the position grew out of the desire of Monsanto’s leadership and safety culture to protect workers both on and off the job. “I think the reality for most companies is, without a doubt, they have more employees getting hurt off the job than at work,” Chancellor said.

Monsanto tracks off-the-job injury data through information from insurance companies. This raw, aggregate data – while specific to the company and its sites – is not employee-specific; workers are not identified by name.

This allows the company to learn what injuries are suffered by employees and their families to help gear off-the-job programs to curb those injuries. “We’re really trying to understand our off-the-job safety issues for our employees and their families,” Chancellor said.

The downside is that the data received identifies only the injury, not how it occurred. “That’s a real missing link in our data collection,” Chancellor said. “Without the cause, from a safety managerial perspective, it’s very difficult to develop effective strategies.”

#### Feature at a Glance

More injuries occur off the job than on the job, yet off-the-job safety is not a focus for many companies. How can a safety professional “sell” the idea of off-the-job safety to both employers and employees?

#### Key points

- Using localized injury data better reflects the impact off-the-job injuries may have on a company.
- Whatever an employer invests into an off-the-job safety program would be offset by savings from a reduction in off-the-job injury costs, according to experts.
- Having employees share personal experiences – rather than telling them facts – can be an effective way to facilitate off-the-job safety.

## OFF-THE-JOB SAFETY

However, there is a way. External cause of injury codes, also known as e-codes, explain how an injury occurs. They are mandated in 26 states, with an additional 14 states collecting them on a voluntary basis.

Chancellor hopes more states will mandate the collection of e-codes. He recommended companies track and gather off-the-job injury data, then compare those figures to on-the-job injury data. "They'll see a real opportunity," he said.

**Plus** [www.nsc.org/plus](http://www.nsc.org/plus)  
calculate your company's OTJ injury costs

Former Southwestern Bell Corp. financial and risk management executive John Myre, based in Chesterfield, MO, saw another opportunity several years ago. While working for SBC, Myre conducted a study and found the company spent more money on off-the-job injuries than on-the-job ones.

After retiring from the company in 1991, Myre authored a book on off-the-job safety, titled "Living Safely in a Dangerous World," which offers information on the benefits of an organizational off-the-job safety program. Those benefits, according to Myre, outweigh any potential costs of implementing such a program.

Companies can track the progress of their off-the-job programs through reduction in lost workdays and other

facets, Myre said. "You could rationally assume if you put in an off-the-job program, you're going to save someone from a serious injury or fatality," he said.

That, in turn, will save companies money in the long run. For a safety professional, dollar signs may be the way to sell the idea of an off-the-job safety program for employers, according to Stein-Harris.

### Think locally

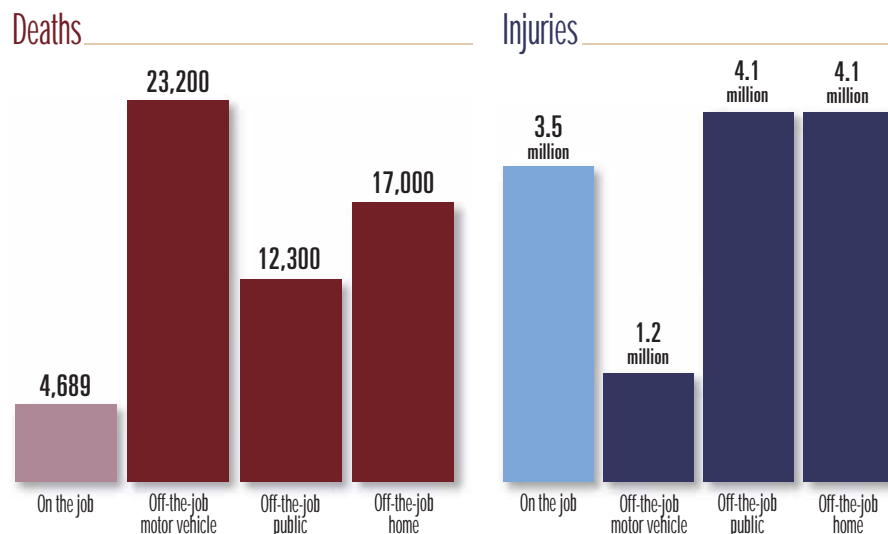
A larger company that is able to reduce off-the-job injuries could conceivably reap millions of dollars in cost savings. But would the investment in an off-the-job program benefit a small or midsize company in a similar way?

Despite being employed by an international corporation, Chancellor stresses that off-the-job safety is something that can be implemented successfully by a company of any size. In fact, a small company or site may even have a better handle on the impact such a program has on off-the-job safety than a larger corporation, he said. "Small companies still have a very big opportunity to affect off-the-job safety. They know everybody. It becomes very personal."

[Off-the-job safety] is difficult to sell. There's no rule that says you have to do this."

Philip Chancellor, Monsanto

## ON- AND OFF-THE-JOB STATISTICS, 2007



Source: National Safety Council, "Injury Facts," 2009

"For a small company, it's even more critical to have an off-the-job program because of the importance of any given individual," Myre added.

Monsanto's approach uses numerous teams spread across the globe that run off-the-job promotions specific to their own demographics. For instance, a site in a rural area may have a hunting safety promotion that would be absent from an urban site.

Along those lines, Monsanto recently reached out to its employees with a survey asking them what off-the-job safety issues are important to them and their families. Learning what is important to workers, Chancellor said, helps the

company better provide education to keep them safe off the job.

### On and off go hand-in-hand

Selling off-the-job safety to employees may be the toughest part, according to Myre. “People don’t want to hear this. They don’t want to hear their lifetime odds of dying,” he said. Employees may also feel that their bosses have no right to “intrude” into their personal lives and will be less receptive to the idea of off-the-job safety coming from their employers.

One way around that problem may be to incorporate the program into pre-existing on-the-job training, as Monsanto has done. For instance, with hazard communication, safety professionals in the company found employees can better relate to Material Safety Data Sheets and chemical labeling when the conversation discusses chemicals or containers one might have in the garage or bathroom of his or her home.

“If we bring those discussions of on-the-job safety and talk about off-the-job, we have seen it opens people up and we get a lot more,” Chancellor said. This

has the added effect of not only improving on-the-job safety, but also helping to sell off-the-job safety to employees.

Additionally, with Monsanto’s on-the-job program, employees have an opportunity to talk about near misses at work. The company has now incorporated the idea of sharing near misses that occur off the company’s lot.

“We have pretty phenomenal stories that people have told us of off-the-job experiences they have had,” Chancellor said. When co-workers begin sharing these personal stories

with each other as part of a safety program, he said, off-the-job safety becomes more “real” – especially when the stories are about families and children. “All of sudden, people have a tendency to listen a little closer,” he said. And just as using localized off-the-job injury information may help sell the idea to employers, using that same data – derived straight from the workforce and their families – could hammer home the very real possibility of being injured off the job.

“For a small company, it’s even more critical to have an off-the-job program.”

John Myre, author, “Living Safely in a Dangerous World”



Successfully selling the idea of off-the-job safety to employees can result in additional on-the-job benefits, according to Myre. “A lot of workers’ [compensation] cases begin as an off-the-job injury,” he said. Curbing those injuries eliminates the chances that they will become exacerbated on the job – which can save companies money.

### Closing the deal

What is perhaps the No. 1 fear for most companies – that an off-the-job safety program would be expensive – may be unfounded. An off-the-job program would not have to be very expensive, especially if it is fused with a current on-the-job program, Stein-Harris said.

“The perception is that off-the-job programs require additional resources” like staff time and money, she said. “I am convinced that whatever that is, it is offset by what could be saved.”

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