



The Cost of Safety and the Economy

There has been more and more talk about companies trying to save money by cutting the safety budget because of the economy. Not a good idea says Warren Brown, president of the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE). Ultimately the reasons why safety makes good sense, not only for the well-being of the employees but also good economic sense don't change just because the economy takes a turn for the worse.

The cost of an injury doesn't drop, it actually increases so spending money to protect that workers continues to be a sound investment. Cutting costs almost always means compromising on quality or a reduction in the PPE which can increase the risk of injury. There are certainly ways to save without compromising and these should be a crucial part of the safety budget no matter what the economy is like.

How not to cut costs:

Eliminate the safety officer – Bad move! Though your safety officers pay is not something that you can directly correlate to productivity, the loss of the safety officer will quickly show how much they were actually worth as injuries and fines mount.

Consolidate work – Either by eliminating the Safety officer and assigning their tasks to someone else in the company on top of their present duties or by giving the safety officer additional work which amounts to giving him or her less time and resources to monitor and stay on top of safety issues.

Try to make the PPE last longer – Personal Protective Equipment needs to be replaced when it has become unsafe to continue using it. Period. Trying to “wring a little more use of it” is only going to lead to more injuries.

Compromise on quality – We see this everyday, someone walks in says a glove is too expensive and that he wants to make do with a cheaper one. Although there are times when a more expensive glove isn't warranted, most of the time these people find that there's a reason that the glove that they have been purchasing is more expensive and that the cheaper glove falls apart faster or doesn't provide the level of protection that they need.

Eliminate training – Granted, training can be expensive. You might be tempted to believe that your employees know this stuff and that you can do without it this year. All it takes is a couple of pertinent questions to find out how much they have either forgotten or never really learned.



How to cut costs the right way:

Ask for a discount – If you are purchasing even a couple of hundred dollars a month on safety items and personal protective equipment and you are paying list price, you should be able to cut the cost of your safety supplies by 20% or more just by calling and asking what kind of a discount they would be willing to extend to you.

Standardize – There is a right way and a wrong way to do this but done the right way this is probably the easiest and quickest way to affect the bottom line. Standardization that forces employees to wear safety gear that isn't comfortable or that's "dorky" isn't the right way. Employees need to be able to wear the PPE that is comfortable and works best for them. Having said that, however, many companies have 20 different gloves and 20 different styles of safety glasses for 20 different employees simply because each one has a different idea of what's "cool". In most situations, a glove that works well for a certain application is going to work well for almost everyone. While looking good in safety glasses is one thing, it's quite another when employees insist on the latest and coolest (and usually most expensive). There are "cool" looking options that don't have to cost a fortune (see for example the [Mirage safety glasses](#)).

Take advantage of free expert help – If you need a quick refresher course in fit testing or lockout/tagout you might be able to get a manufacturer rep to come out and help. Contact your safety supplier and ask if they can help line something up for you. If you are a good customer they should be willing to help you out.

The Costco approach – Most companies out there give deeper discounts for large quantities so if you know that you are going to use 3 pallets of Atlas gloves, for example, in the coming year, it might be a good idea to bring in the full 3 pallets at a huge savings and simply store them somewhere to be used as needed. This saves not only on the cost per glove but also on the cost of freight (a single large shipment is substantially less than several small shipments). This might not be possible on all your items (nor is it advisable as some products have expiration dates and degrade over time) but where you can you can create a pretty big savings.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. Others have found different ways to save without compromising on safety. Try brainstorming with the employees, with your suppliers, manufacturers, etc... You might be surprised at what you come up with!