



Training

Q&A: Safety Specialist Gives Regional Take on Common Problem Areas

Don Sears | Feb 22, 2018

From knowing how to prepare for a visit from Cal/OSHA to the hot summer climate, we talk to MSC safety specialist Damon Cassell to get a view of how customers in California deal with the full range of safety equipment issues, compliance advice and changing safety behavior for the betterment of workers.

Navigating worker safety and compliance problems is no easy feat—especially when it comes to knowing the *right personal protective equipment* for a given task, work environment and climate. Imagine parts of the country where temperatures rise over 100 degrees in the summer and early fall, as it does in Southern California and other parts of the Western U.S. As with all PPE, but especially under these conditions, workers do not want to wear ill-fitting or uncomfortable eyewear, gloves, fall harnesses and other gear. On top of those issues, there are federal and state regulations to manage.

In California, *Cal/OSHA* has its own regulations that are *specific to the state* and different from those of the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration program, including rules on air contaminant exposure, such as silica, and in areas such as hazard communication, confined spaces, heat illnesses and ergonomic standards.

We recently sat down with safety specialist Damon Cassell, QSSP, who works in MSC's West region in greater Los Angeles serving customers in light and heavy manufacturing environments, to discuss how he helps his customers deal with regional safety, compliance and behavior issues. Cassell, who has a background in chemistry and marine biology, spent time working for a major safety glove company, Magid, and spent several years as a deep cleaning specialist for Cintas.

Name: Damon Cassell

Title: Safety Specialist

Background: Safety, industrial safety, worked for Magid Glove & Safety and Cintas, focused on deep cleaning

Certifications: QSSP, Bachelor of Science in Chemistry, Marine Biology

Tenure at MSC: 1 year

Region: West

Need help finding the right PPE for the job? Find the right safety and PPE equipment for your specific environment in our ***product selector*** right here at Better MRO.

What safety questions do you regularly answer for your customers?

CASSELL: As you can imagine, our customers ask us questions on a wide range of safety topics, areas of concern and confusion about the right PPE or about standards and regulations—including how to change their employees' ***safety behavior***. Some examples include very specific questions around ***eyewear***, such as with anti-fog safety glasses: What are the ***best models***? For hand protection, I often answer questions related to gloves about the proper shell and coating materials to avoid cuts and punctures and the right choices for ***heat-resistant gloves*** for a variety of different temperatures. Some of my customers want to know what is required by law for lockout/tagout or how many eyewash stations they have to have. Others want to know how they can help their staff avoid ergonomic injuries—especially questions around regularly lifting items and objects over 50 pounds.

*Are you confused about the choices in safety gloves? Have no fear. Read "***How to Choose the Right PPE: Safety Gloves***."*

Can you tell us about the variety of manufacturing settings you encounter and the differences you view from a safety perspective?

CASSELL: Again, I encounter a wide range of customer types and industries including metalworking and metal forges, heavy industrial manufacturers, food, oil, gas and utilities, and government agencies. The manufacturing settings definitely affect the type of questions I receive. Light manufacturing doesn't deal with the same issues as heavy. Light may have issues with lockout/tagout and safety glasses. Heavy manufacturing may also have needs for heat-resistant PPE or impact gloves.

Do any safety issues come up for you that are part of the regional climate? Do other local environmental or site factors affect safety programs?

CASSELL: Two that come to mind out here in the West region are the proximity to Asia and heat and hydration. With the prevalence of online buying capabilities, customers can order items directly from Asia. The problem with this for our customers is that they cannot be assured that what they purchase will comply with industry standards and U.S. laws. Often, a customer may purchase an item thinking it's the right application and protection only to find out they have to buy another, different item, costing them additional time and money. When they ask us, we don't just throw an item at the problem. Our team looks into the reason why the customer is using the particular PPE item and look

for solutions that go to the root of the issue, with an aim toward positively affecting things over the long term.

In Los Angeles and the rest of the West region, temperatures regularly exceed 100 degrees in the summer and early fall. Our customers need to comply with Cal/OSHA rules to keep their employees safe from dehydration and heat stress injury.

Do your customers have relationships with their local OSHA representatives or other standards bodies and safety working groups? Do you encourage them to communicate with these groups? If so, what are the benefits of working with OSHA and others?

CASELL: Typically, I've found customers are concerned about opening themselves up to unnecessary scrutiny with OSHA, so no, I do not see much in the way of that here. I encourage them to work with us before they are visited by a regulator, so that they can potentially avoid violations, fines and a very long meeting with Cal/OSHA. We can help them tackle the requirements in everything from hazard communication to PPE that goes beyond just trying to hit the regulation, but also that allows them to truly help their employees perform their duties safely on the job.

What safety trends most affect your customers? What industry safety trends are making an impact that customers may not be aware of?

CASELL: Lacerations are by far the most common injury my customers experience. There is also some unfortunate *machine-induced* injuries that need the proper *machine guarding* and *lockout/tagout procedures* to be put in place. But there are plenty of trends in ergonomic injuries with the back, shoulder and wrist areas that come up—as well as eye injuries where customers do not always realize there are great foam-lined safety glasses options.

Also, I do see a lot of new trends in respirators and dealing with air quality. As far as other safety products that customers may not be aware of, there are excellent floor coatings and paints that work well, as well as some nice options in tool tethers to protect against dropped objects.

Fall protection comes up a lot in safety topics. Whether as the leading violation from OSHA every year or with the fairly new enforcement of fall protection training, how do you see efforts to protect workers from falls going? Are your customers struggling to meet fall protection training standards?

CASELL: Manufacturers are confused by many fall protection and fall protection training requirements and do need experts to explain the law and programs. Their confusion often freezes them into nonaction or just going with the status quo. In terms of standards, qualitatively around two-thirds of them are out of compliance, with many lacking a competent person to own the training, inspection and tracking.

Not sure about fall protection? Get the facts. Read "[How to Choose the Right PPE: Fall Protection](#)."

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What area of safety causes the most confusion or difficulty in choosing PPE? What guidance do you give customers to overcome challenges in PPE?

CASELL: The area that causes the most confusion and difficult challenges are conflicts in understanding PPE between OSHA, Cal/OSHA and recommendations from manufacturers. Some of my customers look to the minimum requirements as guidelines for a safety program. They ask us for answers, alluding to wanting only the minimum requirements. We often give a best-practice and compliance multifaceted answer that includes what they are required to do by law, what industry standards dictate and what the employer should do in good conscience.

What does it take for companies to embrace safety as a culture that benefits workers and the business at the same time? How do you advise companies to move beyond a “check the compliance box” mentality?

CASSELL: The ability to care is inherent in everyone, shaped by their world view and life experience. You cannot make anyone care, exactly, but you can identify what motivates someone to be safe and tap into that motivation to help them become safer. I’ve seen examples of employees being allowed to post photos of their family members placed next to a safety slogan that help motivate them to be safer.

The most successful companies, who save millions of dollars by being safe, are the ones with leadership that have bought into continuous improvement in safety. It has to come from the top down from management that shows simple human care and enforcement of policies. They have to empower employees to stop and assess unsafe work areas and unsafe situations. They also have to make sure safety problems are identified and dealt with ... Initially, I gauge the customer’s willingness to change, then appeal to their sense of care for their fellow employees, using examples of injuries I’ve seen in the past.

Also, I help to explain how they can solve their safety issues with the most logical and practical solutions at an affordable cost. I also advise them on how to identify employees that care—and use them to empower employees to motivate others to help multiply their efforts. I also advise that they should reward results for near-miss reporting and similar safety report actions—so that accountability is being tracked and practiced regularly.

*Need more guidance on how to embrace safety culture at your company? Check out **“To Integrate Safety Culture, Focus on Changing Behavior.”***

How does your company handle its safety questions in compliance and PPE? Do you have help? Share your experience in the comments below.

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