

Thoughts and a 'top 10 list' of tips from a very safe wire company

Marlin Steel Wire Products (Maryland) recently topped 1,500 days (about four years) and sister company Madsen Steel Wire Products (Indiana) had over 1,200 days (about three-and-a-half years) without a lost time accident. Below, Drew Greenblatt, president of both companies, shares his advice on how to make a safer work site.

Protecting your employees is job #1. Creating systems and a culture that embraces safety should be your primary mission. We want every teammate to go home after a long day of work in the same healthy condition they started with. This approach is a moral imperative for your leadership team. Our Baltimore, Maryland, team recently crossed the 1,500 days (about four years) without a lost time accident. The prior record was over 2,800 days (about seven-and-a-half years). Here are some techniques we deploy to protect our team. I encourage you to consider these ideas:

Form a Safety Committee. This can be made from a variety of departments on the factory floor (and different shifts). Meet monthly to discuss suggestions that can improve the well-being of your team. Prioritize the ideas so that the elements most likely to cause harm are grappled with first. Give your Safety Committee a significant financial mandate to institute reforms. Encourage them to move quickly.

Near misses. If you had a close one, memorialize it, take pictures of the area, and interview all participants and devote time to ensure it cannot happen again. Do not cast blame. You want teammates to feel comfortable to offer constructive feedback that could save a future life or finger.

Lift smartly. Pick up objects with your legs, not back. Invest in technology so employees use their back less often.

Install bright lights. Workers are less likely to trip or fall if one can see clearly.

Clear aisles and quickly discard debris. Trash old machines. Fewer objects to navigate makes it easier to do your job without inadvertently hitting a shoal.

Ban extension cords. Electricians can run a hard wire to machines and devices. Extensions are easy to trip on, and can fray and cause a shock.

Forklift 101. Train all employees that would ever need to use a forklift truck the proper method. No others can use it.



Madsen Steel Wire Products Safety Committee members (l-r): Aaron Sanders, Jennifer Lewis, Tami Mohney, Joe Sandoval and Deanna Randol.

New equipment. New machinery is exciting, and it should come with proper caging and instant shut-off mechanisms, but it's also a time for caution. It may be different in some ways, and your safety committee should inspect it for any potential safety hazards that could stem from its use.

Invite OSHA to visit. Yes, you heard me right. OSHA's consultation program is to be welcomed. They will give free advice on issues that may cause an injury. Be grateful for anything they find.

Invite your Workers' Compensation Insurance Company (WCIC) to visit. They have a vested interest in making sure your claims are low. They offer a free review of your factory floor similar to the OSHA Consultation Program.

Other Greenblatt safety points

- Except for OSHA, the WCIC and shared wisdom of Wire Fabricators Association members, all our ideas were home grown. Our employees (40 at Marlin/50 at Madsen) have decision-making authority. They conceive, discuss and execute on ways to improve safety. I am on the sidelines, cheering them on. They know safety better than me.
- In terms of safety, we always want to be 1% better every day. Incremental improvements over time will generate outsized success in the long run.
- Most Covid measures, like splitting up the team to distance them, have been phased out. Mask wearing is not required. Increased cleaning cycles will be continued.
- Safety is the first thing we discuss at every production meeting. I think this posture helps us recruit and retain talent. Our employees want to be part of a family that cares about them. Lots of places look at employees as replaceable, and we reject that thesis. We embrace our talent with training, good pay and great benefits, and protecting them in the workplace is integral to our mutual success.



Marlin Steel Wire Products Safety Committee members (l-r): Jason Ducote, George Schultz, Asia Bright and Kenny Browning. Standing: Gabrielle Silgalis and Liston Clise.