



March 11, 2019

CONTACT: Barbara Riley

(202) 463-2436, comm@afandpa.org

A New Paradigm for Preventing Serious Injuries and Fatalities

By Paul R. Noe

Vice President, Public Policy

The forest products industry, like others, is embracing a new paradigm to help prevent serious injuries and fatalities (SIFs) in the workplace. Safety professionals for many years acted under a paradigm based on the concept of the “Safety Triangle,” which assumed that if minor injuries at the bottom of the triangle were reduced, the more serious injuries at the top of the triangle also would commensurately decline. This led to a focus on reducing the total number of injuries – measured through the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s “Total Recordable Incident Rate” (TRIR) – as the way to measure success in safety efforts. But increasingly, companies and industries that were achieving significant declines in their TRIR were not seeing comparable declines in SIFs.

Pioneering thought leaders, particularly Dr. Tom Krause, closely examined the data for many industries and concluded that even significant declines in the TRIR actually were not producing comparable reductions in SIFs.¹ This revealed that only a subset of minor injuries are associated with precursors to SIFs, so reducing SIFs requires a different strategy than reducing minor injuries.² As a result, safety professionals have begun to focus on leading indicators, rather than lagging indicators such as the TRIR, directing resources and attention to identifying and remediating SIF precursors -- unmitigated high-risk situations that would result in a SIF if allowed to continue.³ This can be achieved through an ongoing process that facilitates continual learning and improvement.⁴

¹ See, e.g., Thomas R. Krause and Kristen J. Bell, *7 Insights Into Safety Leadership* (Kendra Greene, ed., The Safety Leadership Institute 2015) (www.amazon.com/7-Insights-into-Safety-Leadership/dp/0996685901).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ See, e.g., Donald K. Martin and Alison Black, “Preventing Serious Injuries and Fatalities (SIFs): A New Study Reveals Precursors and Paradigms,” DEKRA Insight (2016) (https://dekra-insight.com/images/white-paper-documents/wp_preventing-sif_us_A4.pdf)

With the insights of experts such as Dr. Krause and others, and the support of its Board of Directors, member company safety professionals and workers, AF&PA has launched a voluntary SIF prevention program. Major elements of the program include:

(1) leadership and management commitment; (2) employee involvement; (3) risk identification; (4) risk management; (5) measuring and monitoring progress; and (6) continuous improvement.

How each company addresses the details will depend on many factors, such as their current needs, characteristics of their facilities, level of safety maturity, strength of existing safety programs, capability to adapt, and strength of safety leadership and culture.⁵ We have much work ahead, but we are grateful to be heading in the right direction.

⁵ See id.

#

The American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) serves to advance a sustainable U.S. pulp, paper, packaging, tissue and wood products manufacturing industry through fact-based public policy and marketplace advocacy. AF&PA member companies make products essential for everyday life from renewable and recyclable resources and are committed to continuous improvement through the industry's sustainability initiative — [Better Practices, Better Planet 2020](#). The forest products industry accounts for approximately four percent of the total U.S. manufacturing GDP, manufactures nearly \$300 billion in products annually and employs approximately 950,000 men and women. The industry meets a payroll of approximately \$55 billion annually and is among the top 10 manufacturing sector employers in 45 states. Visit AF&PA online at afandpa.org or follow us on Twitter [@ForestandPaper](https://twitter.com/ForestandPaper).