



What You Missed At The EHS Today's America's Safest Companies Conference

Insights

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EHS held the Second Annual [America's Safest Companies Conference](#) this week in Atlanta. As we did last year, we worked with EHS Today to develop the conference and co-sponsored it. Our goal was not to develop the largest safety conference. Our goal was to genuinely develop the best conference. Okay, I recognize that every conference provider claims the same goal.

However, based upon response from attendees at the first two conferences, we are well on our way to achieving Ed's goal of a safety conference that complements efforts by ASSE, NSC, the AGC, and other groups with deep learning and sharing. One distinction of the conference is the guaranteed interaction and networking between the high level safety professionals who are both attendees and participants.

EHS Today will provide summaries of some of the conference presentations. As an example, I encourage you to read today's EHS article on the presentation on ["Recipe For Best In Class Safety"](#) by Mark Eitzman. I'll also share a few observations today to guide you in your appreciation of the topics.

What especially interested me ...? In the last year, I have focused heavily on determining how to effectively engage employees in the safety process. Moreover, as a labor lawyer, I am convinced that employers who effectively engage employees in their safety process will also reduce legal claims, EEOC charges, and improve productivity. Numerous people praised the practical suggestions provided by J.A. Rodriguez and Paul Zybert in their session, "Employee Engagement and Raytheon: Real Programs and Strategies That Ignite Employee Engagement."

While I did not hear Gary Namie's session, people praised his presentation on "Workplace Bullying: The Silent Employee Health Hazard." Some of us may not have initially taken the concept of "Workplace Bullying" as serious as the topic warrants. However, the advent of social media has now made workplace bullying into a problem that can even lead to workplace violence.

Former District Attorney and Fisher Phillips attorney, Betsy Winthrop and I talked about the always important subject of "Criminal Liability for Environmental, Safety & Health violations." I doubt that any session was more practical than the session where Betsy made comments such as, "don't be worried about spending one night in jail."

NIOSH Director John Howard, Dusty Farrell of Georgia Pacific and G.E.'s Mike Vigezzi showed the importance of the safety profession catching up with the environmental community in integrating sustainability into the business model.

Milliken's Wayne Punch was described as "a genius" in discussing the illness prevention program process and its effect on one's business. His co-panelists, Southern Company's Bob Fitzgerald, and Mike Maddox, Corporate VPP at NuStar Energy, further set out steps to take.

Anthony Rosa, OSHA Assistant Regional Administrator for Whistleblower Protection Programs and Ben Ross, Assistant Regional Administrator – Region IV, provided candid guidance on avoiding whistleblower claims and effectively resolving OSHA citations at informal conferences, mandatory settlement hearings, and during litigation. Forensic Psychologist Harley Stock and Steve Davis, GRM, Inc. provided eye-opening guidance on preparing for and handling workplace violence.

My law partner, Hagood Tighe and I, along with David Lynn of Life Safety, Inc. provided examples where third parties have wreaked great harm on employers' "brand" by focusing on alleged safety and environmental failures. As in the case of preparing for fatalities and catastrophes, an employer can not learn how to handle such attacks as they go along. Those who wanted to hear about cutting age wellness strategies were impressed by Carol Henson, Delta Airlines Manager – Voluntary Protection Program, Sherri Snow, Wellness Manager – ACIPCO, Jeff Romine, Senior Corporate Safety Manager – Shaw Industries, and our baseball loving Benefits Practice Chair, Bob Christenson.

Please treat this article as an encouragement to join us for next year's conference, and to continue to work with other associations and organizations to develop the most safety education efforts as possible. Safety is one area where even competitors can help one another. When one company is cited or loses an employee, the whole industry suffers.

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