



# Product Safety Culture



Product safety is a primary corporate objective, sponsored by upper management and tied to an enterprise-wide risk management program. Producing safe products should be embedded in a company's culture and should involve everyone in the company.



### What is product safety culture?

Product safety culture is the overall approach that defines a company's commitment to loss prevention in their product design, production, marketing and servicing. This includes the original product design process, which allows for contemplating safety during assembly, installation, initial start-up, operation, servicing and end-of-life disposal.

### Why is it important?

A product safety culture that focuses on the customer demonstrates ethics and corporate responsibility, promoting your corporate image through positive social media feedback and a positive work environment. Companies known for their ethics may experience increased product success and reduced potential for claims and lawsuits. If a lawsuit is filed, your company will have formal product safety documentation to support your defense. And if a recall is necessary, the existing positive corporate image will help balance any negative publicity.

### How is it developed?

A top-down approach is critical to product safety culture. Top management must be fully committed and the driving force behind the culture. All aspects of product safety should be documented in writing to formalize the company's direction and activities. Larger companies may have formal committees. Smaller companies may have leadership representation from each department, with product safety as part of their performance goals.

### What steps ensure product safety culture?

#### Include product safety in the company values, goals or mission statement.

- Identify product safety as being essential to the company. A formal product safety policy may also be developed.
- Making product safety a company objective highlights its importance and further defines your company.
- Define a reporting system with representation from all departments.
- A company with an enterprise-wide risk management program already has a framework.
- Establishing a formal product safety committee allows for a targeted approach.
- All departments are represented on a product safety committee that tracks activities and goals.
- If a merger or acquisition is planned, the product safety culture of the new entity should be evaluated, and committee representation should be added.

#### Maintain open communication regarding activities, successes and opportunities for improvement.

- When there is communication, document it.
- When there is a committee meeting, document it.
- When an issue is resolved, document it.
- Defending a product liability case is more challenging if a product safety culture is claimed, but there is no proof.

### What are the measures of a successful product safety culture?

- Product complaints are decreasing.
- New ideas and improvements are being implemented.
- New products have better safety features.
- Product literature has been updated in the past few years rather than the past few decades.
- Hazards have been engineered out.
- Product safety is being discussed in the product concept stage.

## Who is responsible?

The short answer is everyone.

Structured responsibilities will exist throughout the company. The defined roles and responsibilities of your quality assurance program provide a framework for how each department supports product safety. While an individual, department or committee may have partial responsibility for product safety, it involves all departments.

This list of responsibilities demonstrates each department's contributions to supporting a company's product safety culture, which is crucial to the companywide loss prevention activities.

**Administrative** – Top management must create and maintain the company's product safety culture.

**Human Resources** – HR must understand product safety culture to recruit the right staff.

**Design & Engineering** – These departments are a dominant force in promoting product safety.

**Purchasing** – Purchasing must ensure product safety while acquiring raw materials and component parts. If a supplier changes, re-evaluations may be needed. If a component parts supplier subcontracts the fabrication of a component part, an audit of the new fabrication company may be needed.

**Production** – All changes in production materials, processes, and equipment must be documented and evaluated to ensure product or service integrity.

**Quality** – This department measures product and service quality against company requirements. Safety elements are often measured in the process.

**Marketing** – "Failure to warn" is common in product liability litigation. Printed instructions, online user manuals, quick start guides, and internet videos of your product provide an opportunity to demonstrate the proper use of your product and include all required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

**Sales** – Similar to marketing, sales demonstrations can highlight safety features. For example, product demonstrations with bypassed safety interlocks also demonstrate how easily a safety feature can be bypassed on a production floor.

**Legal** – Contracts, terms and conditions, instructions, user manuals, videos and marketing materials must be subjected to a legal review from a product safety perspective.

**Service** – Preventative maintenance and repair procedures may increase the potential for exposure to normally protected hazards. Additional product safety features may need to be contemplated.

**Returns and Trade-in Department** – Once a product has served its purpose and is no longer useable, it may pose a hazard if discarded or repurposed.

## Resources

[Consumer Product Safety Commission \(CPSC\) HANDBOOK](#)

[ISO 10377, Consumer product safety – Guidelines for suppliers](#)

[Clarion Safety Systems – Product Safety Consulting and Machinery Risk Assessment Service](#)

For more information, visit [cna.com/riskcontrol](https://cna.com/riskcontrol).

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