



TRSA's Safety Certification— Raising Standards to Reduce Risks

New safety program offers launderers an industry-specific focus on prevention

By Jack Morgan

One of worries that keep laundry operators up at night is the possibility that a serious safety incident in the plant could trigger a crisis—not only for the victim—but for the company and its employees who must cope with the aftermath of such an event.

Most laundry operators want to put safety first and comply with the rules set down by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). But some fall short of their goals amid pressing demands from customers, equipment issues, staffing challenges and more. What's needed to keep safety front and center is a framework for incident prevention that staff can understand and follow on a daily basis. That's what TRSA's new Safety & Health Certification program is designed to do for your company. "TRSA's Safety Certification will provide operators with ample support to manage risk-reduction on a daily basis," says TRSA President and CEO

Joseph Ricci. "Our goal is to raise safety standards across the industry, so that commercial laundries become a model for other industries to follow in terms of incident prevention."

TRSA's Safety & Health certification recognizes your facility's commitment to safety and health (S&H) excellence. The certification verifies that your facility meets S&H standards that consistently exceed OSHA requirements. The S&H certification is based on a portion of the OSHA Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) STAR certification guidelines. The program focuses on four major elements reviewed at individual locations:

- Management Leadership and Employee Involvement
- Worksite Hazard Analysis
- Hazard Prevention and Control
- Safety and Health Training

Why Certify?

As a plant-based program, achieving third-party confirmation of your facility's commitment to safety and health standards can generate numerous benefits, in addition to preventing incidents, that could harm employees and/or systems. For example, consider staff morale. An emphasis on safety and health shows employees that you care about their well-being. That, in turn, drives employee engagement. Motivated employees help generate improved business results.

Standardizing your S&H program with TRSA's third-party certification helps to protect people and equipment by implementing safety protocols and compliance programs. These efforts lead to fewer incidents, which also can generate savings by eliminating OSHA fines. What's more, avoiding work-related employee injuries can translate to a lower Experience Modification Rate (EMR). Improving your EMR score can potentially save your company hundreds of thousands of dollars on workers' compensation premiums. Brian Varner, a consultant and owner of Safety Solutions for Healthcare, Denver, will oversee TRSA's S&H Certification program. His website features testimonials from clients who've achieved significant savings on workers' comp insurance after adopting his recommendations for lowering their EMR. "He implemented programs and processes that included: Safety Training; Monthly Safety Topics; a point-scored Safety Inspection; and a Comprehensive Injury-Reporting process to better identify and correct Root Causes," says Chris Corcoran, speaking of Varner's efforts. They also reviewed monthly Loss Run Reports to gain better understanding of shifting trends. Corcoran is a former TRSA board member. He currently serves as executive vice president of HHS-FMA, a broad-based service company that assists hospitals, hotels and other organizations with

services that include facility support, food and dining, recruiting and laundry. The HHS-FMA operates 10 laundry facilities, including seven large plants that previously were operated by Foussard Montague Associates Inc. "The results of the programs and processes were phenomenal!" says Corcoran of an incident-reduction program that he pursued with a previous employer. "We experienced a 33% decrease in workers' compensation claims and a 74% decrease in 'out of' workdays. We also experienced a 51% decrease in strain-related claims (our No. 1 injury). This all resulted in an impact on our bottom line, with a \$350K reduction in premiums."

Samlane Ketepong, **TRSA's** senior director, certification and accreditation, noted the S&H certification program's emphasis on incident prevention. "Making safety a priority value for your facility is a key objective of the S&H certification," she says. "The certification program will help your facility standardize an effective safety effort that helps protect financial, human and physical assets by helping to create and implement protocol and safety-compliance plans. Strong safety programs help build a solid business foundation."

How S&H Certification Works

TRSA's S&H certification program centers on five "pillars" of incident prevention:

- Training
- Awareness
- Compliance
- Claims Management
- Measurement

Certified facilities will receive a monthly safety package of materials for preventing OSHA violations and other laundry-specific Safety and Health issues. These resources include:

Certification Beta Testing—A 'Second Set of Eyes'

As **TRSA's** new Safety & Health (S&H) Certification program launches this month, the leaders behind the program, namely consultant Brian Varner and Samlane Ketepong, senior director for certification & accreditation, recently began field testing the program's plant-audit process for maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

Jerry Magallanes is director of safety & training for HHS-FMA, Dripping Springs, TX, a company specializing in providing linen and laundry services to hospitals and health systems. The group operates seven large plants and three small laundry facilities. Their staff agreed to participate in a beta test of the S&H audit process. The testing took place at HHS-FMA's Hospital Cooperative Laundry in Denver. The test team for the audit included Varner and T.J. Peterson, the certification audit manager for **TRSA's** Hygienically Clean program.

Magallanes, based in Lodi, CA, conducts his own twice-yearly safety assessments of this plant and others in the HHS-FMA group. Previously, he worked for many years as a plant manager at the Denver facility when it was managed by Foussard Montague & Associates. HHS-FMA acquired that group in November 2021. Magallanes says, "The beta inspection in Denver was fair and thorough. What's more, the plant's general manager told him it was helpful to have an outside review of the plant's safety conditions. "The feedback that I got from the general manager, it was that 'Jerry, you can do the appraisal, but it's good to have a second set of eyes instead of an in-house inspector.'" Magallanes acknowledged that his many years of working with the team in Denver makes it harder to look at the plant critically. "I know everybody there," he says. "They're my friends, right? And partners and co-workers. And we work together on many projects. So I tend to be a little bit more diplomatic and a little bit more friendly with them than an outside inspector coming in. That's my personal feeling."

The beta inspection took roughly three hours. Along the way, Magallanes, Peterson and Varner were discussing possible modifications, such as fine-tuning the inspection to follow a logical flow from soil to packout in order to improve efficiency. "We're going to make it flow through the plant," he says. "That was one of our observations."

The inspections included both observations of conditions in the plant, as well as interviews with managers and several randomly selected hourly employees. In one case, Varner observed a finishing department employee using lifting techniques that weren't ergonomically sound. He instructed her on proper lifting techniques to reduce the risk of joint strains or similar injuries.

Certification Beta Testing, cont.

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Incident Prevention

- A 10-minute video, including instalking points and a quiz
- A monthly Safety Committee Agenda

We've noted the potential bottom-line impact of safety above. Below are additional benefits that

an improved safety record can deliver, including cutting or eliminating the direct and indirect costs for injuries that impact an employer's bottom line. Examples include:

- Medical expenses
- Costs for legal services
- Training replacement employees

- Accident investigation
- Possible punitive fines and damages
- Implementation of corrective measures
- Lost productivity
- Repairs of damaged equipment/property
- Costs associated with a decline in employee morale and rise in absenteeism. (OSHA.gov).

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On another issue, the beta auditors determined that an employee who'd recently transferred from the janitorial department to maintenance hadn't yet received lockout/tagout training. "They did not do the new-hire orientation for a maintenance-department person," Magallanes says. "Meaning he was not trained on lockout/tagout because he was a transfer. So, that fell through that cracks." Varner and the inspection team pulled the employee aside. They completed the lockout/tagout training that afternoon.

One procedural recommendation that came out of the audit was that plant managers should locate all safety-related information in a high-visibility, central area of the plant. "They said to keep all safety-related messages in one general area and to keep the safety board 'uncluttered'" Magallanes says. He adds that managers should review and promote safety incentives and consult the plant's Loss Run report regularly. The latter document tracks the plant's insurance claims, including the type of claim, the date and amount paid out. The report is critical because it serves as an indicator of whether safety conditions in the plant are improving or deteriorating.

When asked if he felt the inspection process and the S&H certification was worthwhile, Magallanes answered, "Absolutely! Although HHS-FMA already has a robust safety program, we are always evolving and working on improvements. I believe all multi-location companies also have safety directors, but I believe we all have room for improvement. Compliance with the safety program is always a challenge at most plants."

As for follow-ups on the beta audit in Denver, Magallanes says he's offered suggestions to Varner. "Brian and I have had several communications," he says, adding that, "Something that **TRSA** offers, and, in my opinion—and it isn't promoted enough—is that **TRSA** offers a lot of safety-training programs that are industry-specific (such as LOTO, Haz-Com, BBP [bloodborne pathogens] etc.) as part of the certification program."

Additional beta inspections are planned in the coming weeks at other sites to continue in fine-tuning the audit process prior to this month's formal launch of the S&H Certification program.

Operators can learn more about the potential impact that work-related injuries and illnesses can have on your company's bottom line by consulting OSHA's Safety Calculator. This program enables companies to estimate the costs of these incidents. A link to the calculator is also available on the **TRSA's** S&H certification website at bit.ly/OSHAcalculator.

Individual plants can qualify for the S&H certification program by meeting the following criteria:

- No OSHA citations for the facility in the past 12 months or
- The facility has experienced a drop in its EMR over the past year (12 months)
- The plant has experienced a decrease in the Total Recordable Incident Rate (TRIR). This metric tracks the number of OSHA-recordable incidents per 100 employees over the past 12 months. A second metric is the Days Away Restricted or Transfer (DART) over the past 12 months. The DART rate measures the number of days that employees missed work, were placed on restricted duties or had to transfer jobs due to work-related injuries and illnesses.
- They must participate in the **TRSA** Safety Survey

An effective way to prepare for acceptance into the Safety and Health Certification Program is to pursue the Safety Self Audit. Operators

should conduct this audit prior to the third-party on-site audit that's also required for certification. The self-audit is designed to identify, correct and maintain any issues discovered during the audit. This self-audit will offer insights on how your facility could improve its score on the S&H Certification Audit. Operators also should use the Safety Self Audit on a routine basis after certification to ensure compliance and help create a robust safety program. Ketevong describes the self-audit as a tool for determining what issues the operator's team needs to address prior to the formal audit of the plant before certification. "What that self-audit toolkit/calculator does is prepare the plant for the audit," she says. "So essentially, what it provides is information about what the auditor will be auditing the plant on, and they'll have the opportunity to audit themselves on where they are. It's kind of a checklist."

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Facilities that satisfy the above-noted prerequisites are evaluated by a S&H Certification Review Team (CRT), that will complete an on-site audit that will:

- Interview your facility's leaders as well as 5%-10% of randomly selected hourly employees.
- Review your facility's written S&H programs (including OSHA Recordkeeping Program)
- Conduct an on-site audit of your facility's building and equipment
- Assess the effectiveness of your S&H programs

Certification is awarded on a three-year basis, and facilities are audited every three years for renewal. To renew certification, facilities must comply with the OSHA recordkeeping program.

- During your three-year certification period, your facility's rolling average OSHA TRIR rate must be equal to or less than the TRIR

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rates for **TRSA** members as published in the annual **TRSA** Safety Survey or the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) annual report.

- The facility must actively participate in **TRSA's** Safety Survey.

The program's cost is modest, given the potential for savings and enhanced risk management that it could deliver to your company: a

\$250 application fee. There's also a \$2,500 certification fee for the CRT team to complete its audit. This is the same rate required for **TRSA's** Hygienically Clean Certification program. Varner calls this investment "pennies" compared to the value that facilities can gain from certifying, including extensive support from the S&H certification team to help certified plants stay in compliance. "My thing, 'What a steal if it's

\$500 or even \$5,000,'" he says. "You guys not only are going to be certified, you'll have support. My thought is if you're certified, we're here to help you." Operators with questions about the new program may contact Varner at bvarner@trsa.org or Ketevong at sketevong@trsa.org. **TS**



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Laundry-Specific Certification: Q&A with **TRSA**

We recently interviewed Brian Varner, the consultant and owner of Safety Solutions for Healthcare, Denver, who'll oversee **TRSA's** new Safety & Health (S&H) Certification that's launching this month. This certification initiative is designed to help linen, uniform and facility services companies improve their safety and health performance. Below are questions we posed to Varner, and Samlane Ketevong, **TRSA's** senior director for certification and accreditation.

Q: Are the eligibility requirements for S&H certification, such as no OSHA citations for the facility in the past 12 months, or a decrease with the Experience Modification Rate (EMR) from previous 12 months, too stringent?

Varner: "I think that the thought of the (**TRSA**) Safety Committee was, 'How do we make it so that it's not too stringent and give the plant a chance to be able to be eligible, right? We have the two different criteria: One is the citations and the other is a decrease in the EMR, OK? If I have one citation or two, let me see if I can qualify under the second pathway. You know there are going to be certain circumstances where a plant really does want to be eligible for the certification. The S&H team will work with them and try to figure out a way that they can be eligible. So although looking at two different pathways, there's always alternative methods. If the plant is actually showing that they are interested in the certification."

Q: What kind of information is in the "monthly safety packages" mentioned on the S&H Certification area of the **TRSA website?**

Varner: What I did is, with the experience of working with all these laundries all over the country and seeing so many loss run (insurance claim summary) reports, we came up with these monthly topics. If you look at the monthly topics, there's a reason they're planned in a particular part of the year. Like heat exhaustion, for example. We have a lot of heat-related stress claims, typically starting around the June-through-August-September time frame. So we're talking about heat-related stress. Yes and before we get into that heat-related season. We're talking about slip and falls because we start seeing a spike in slip-and-fall injuries in parking lots and with snow on stairs and all that stuff. So there's a reason everything's planned for where it is."

Q: The S&H certification is based on elements of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) guidelines. If a plant wants to improve its safety record, why shouldn't they just work with OSHA on VPP or the agency's Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP)?

Ketevong: "I don't think that we're competing with (OSHA/VPP). I think it's an enhancement." Varner adds that, "You're right. It is an enhancement. But remember that VPP is very broad. It's not specific to the laundry industry. We are specific to the laundry industry. So, this is really important because all our content, our visuals, everything will pertain to the laundry industry, whereas the VPP is more broadly based."