

Hospital shoots for a star

By Jeff Troth MEDDAC PAO



Evans Army Community Hospital is shooting for a star by lowering the number of accidents at the hospital to near zero. Evans is in the middle of implementing a 2.5-year Occupational Safety & Health Administration program that focuses on: hazard prevention and control; worksite analysis; training; and management commitment and worker involvement.

Next spring, the hospital will complete the last two of the three-phase Voluntary Protection Program earning Evans the OSHA VPP Safety Star.

“VPP is a safety management system. It will help us have a lower accident rate and make this a safer place to work,” said Dawn Linde, the hospital safety manager.

“Instead of looking at our organization as a large entity, the program breaks our facility into tiny little spaces and trains everybody in those spaces how to identify hazards in their area,” she said. “It also trains staff on what to do if they find a hazard and gives them a different thought process about safety.”

One thought process she hopes will change is the “old timer shortcuts.” Linde said, that although someone may have been taking a shortcut to get something done and never gets injured, a new person without the knowledge and skills may get hurt trying to follow the shortcut.

“VPP looks at our programs and processes from one side to another, and every task and space in the hospital to see if we can’t make them safer,” Linde said.

The program is geared toward individual worksite needs, and its success depends on both leadership and employee participation.

“Last year we gave a lot of general safety classes to the staff, now we are going into the work spaces and seeing what hazards exist there,” Linde said. “If an area has liquid Nitrogen we are looking at their training program. We can’t get rid of all hazards, but we can make sure that everyone knows how to deal with them appropriately.”

According to OSHA statistics VPP worksites have a lost workday incidence rate at least 50 percent below the average of that industry. VPP was designed to complement not replace an organization’s safety plan.

“We have great safety measures in place already,” said Lt. Col. Eric Poulsen, Evans’ deputy commander for administration and the hospital’s safety management system steering committee chairman. “VPP just gives us another avenue to ensure a safer place to work and a safer place to receive medical care. I want our staff to view VPP in a similar manner to how we approach The Joint Commission continuous readiness.”

“The number one thing is that people work safer and are aware of their surroundings,” said Linde. “Our accident and injury numbers are well below industry standards so we literally have to take them almost to zero to get the star.”

She said that the majority of injuries at Evans occur outside the hospital walls, people getting hurt as they improperly step off curbs or slip on ice between cars in the parking lot. A possible fix to the ice issue that Linde is looking at is to have night shift workers park in a certain area so maintenance workers can clear the other parking lots completely of ice and snow.

Besides making the hospital a safer place, obtaining the OSHA safety star also brings extra funds to EACH. Evans will receive several thousand dollars per month from the Army’s Medical Command for attaining this safety standard.

“It means a safer place to work, but on top of that it means dollars in our budget,” Linde said. “The safety office does not usually bring in money. We don’t do prescriptions, we don’t do labs, we don’t see patients. So this is a way that the safety office can participate in bringing revenue into the hospital.

“Once we get the safety star, the process is not over. OSHA will reevaluate us every three years to make sure that what we are doing is still top notch.”



Col. Dennis LeMaster, Fort Carson Medical Department Activity commander, signs a Statement of Leadership Commitment toward earning OSHA’s Voluntary Protection Plan Safety Star. LeMaster, along

with MEDDAC's command sergeant major and deputy commanders signed the statement during the unit's Organization and Safety Day June 13 at Iron Horse Park. (Photo by Jeff Troth)