

## **MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT “WHAT IT MEANS”**

**BY Mike Maddox, Corporate VPP Director,  
Valero Energy Corporation**

The first element of VPP starts with Management Commitment. Most senior management representatives and plant managers state that they are committed to safety and VPP, but it takes their leadership for the program to succeed.

Leadership is demonstrated by leading by example. It is common to hear “I know I need to spend more time in the plant, but I am too busy with all of the meetings I have to attend.” My reply always is, “how can you find time to attend meetings, but not find time to walk through the plant and visit with your employees?”

During the VPP audit at our Wilmington, California refinery, OSHA was amazed to learn that the plant manager spent a minimum of two hours a day in the plant, walking through the units and shops, talking with employees. His reply to OSHA was really simple. He stated that he schedules time in the plant, just like he schedules meetings. Each day, he would go to the plant control room for the morning meeting; then spend the next hour in the units. When he returned from lunch, he spent the next hour again out in the plant. Most days he would make a third tour of the plant before he went home. It was also evident that he knew the names of every employee.

This plant manager leads by example. When he started spending this amount of time in the plant each day, it was amazing that all of his direct reports suddenly found time to be there also.

At this particular plant there was the same problem that exists in many facilities; employees and contractors not abiding by the plant speed limits. One day after warning everyone about speeding in the plant, he flagged down an employee that was speeding, opened the passenger side of the company vehicle, reached over and pulled the keys out of the ignition. He then calmly told the employee to come back to see him in two weeks and he would decide if he would let him have the keys back. After this there was no longer a speeding problem.

At another one of our facilities working toward becoming a VPP “Star” site the plant manager established performance goals for himself, his operations, maintenance, and technical directors to spend a minimum of eight hours each week in the operating areas of the plant. This resulted in supervisors at all levels suddenly finding more time to spend in the plant to *[sic]*.

The committed plant manager also shows leadership by letting his supervisors know that time needs to be made for employees on various VPP or safety committees to attend regular meetings. This committed leader also finds time to ensure open hazard recognition audit items, process safety management issues and work orders get completed [*sic*] in a timely manner.

When the top manager at a facility establishes what his or her expectations are, it filters down to each level of supervision and to the employees. On the other end of the spectrum, when any supervisor walks by an unsafe act or does not say anything about poor housekeeping, the message is sent that this is ok and has established the expectation level.

At one plant where I conducted my VPP evaluation, there is a huge shop building divided into a welding shop and a machine shop. Housekeeping in the welding shop was great. When I asked several employees why housekeeping in this shop was so good, they all replied that everyone knew not to leave a mess, because the foreman would find you, then bring you back to his shop to clean up. This supervisor established what his expectations are.

In contrast on the other side of the building, housekeeping was very poor. Oil from pumps was on the floor, oily rags everywhere and the work benches so cluttered there was not any room to add another small item. When I commented to the supervisor about the poor housekeeping, he replied “that they try to clean up about once a month”. This supervisor sent the message to his employees that these conditions were acceptable to him; therefore it became acceptable to them. With this message, housekeeping would not get better, only worse.

After finding out that the site maintenance director was in this machine shop for about twenty minutes that morning, I asked him if he said anything to his foreman or the shop employees about the poor housekeeping. When he stated no, I told him he sent the message to all of them that this was acceptable. Therefore it became acceptable to everyone who worked for him.

Leadership also involves corporate management providing the financial and manpower resources required to improve safety and reliability. At Valero, when the Chairman of the Board stated that the corporate commitment is to have all of our refineries become VPP “Star” sites, this goal became important to all other senior management. With this message the Chairman established the expectation level for the entire corporation.

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