

**BEST PRACTICES**

# ***Keys to Employee & Site Safety***

*Information to keep Material Recycling  
Facilities (MRFs) safe & productive*

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**LEADPOINT**   
*High Performance Work Teams.*

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## INTRODUCTION

# *Why Employee Safety Matters*

# Employees Matter.

*So does their safety. Easy to say. Hard to do.*

## **What's most important for any business?**

Some would say profits, long-term viability, and business growth. Others would say making a positive difference in the world and serving the greater good. Many business owners would say the well-being of their employees and customers matters most.

At Leadpoint, our employees are most important. They allow us to earn a profit and grow, contribute to the health of our communities, and sleep well at night.

## **Our employees matter.**

But there's more to it. Our employees work in a dangerous environment – one that could literally kill them. So right up there with the importance of our employees is safety.

## **The safety of our employees matters.**

Saying our employees and their safety matter is easy. Proving it is more difficult.

## **LIVE SAFE**

**In early 2019, Leadpoint introduced LiveSafe, a philosophy that embodies the spirit of caring that lies at the heart of our values and purpose.**

It was developed to help employees see safety as something personal and to reinforce that our safety efforts exist to protect them.

It's a new way to think about safety.

I want every Leadpoint employee to hear, feel, see and *live* the message that they matter to their family, friends, coworkers, and Leadpoint.

I don't think we talk enough about why we ask employees to wear a safety vest and earplugs, why we have training to understand the hazards, why we have PPE...why we do all these things around safety.

The 'why' is so every employee can go home at the end of their shift. That's why.

The message to our employees: We appreciate you. Your work matters. Without you, we don't exist.

*Frank Ramirez, CEO & Founder  
Leadpoint Business Services*



## CHAPTER ONE

# *LiveSafe*

# LiveSafe

*A safer environment at work and at home.*

The goal of LiveSafe is to connect Leadpoint employees with safety on a personal level and reinforce what they can do to be safe at work and at home.

**LiveSafe is a way of life.**

**LiveSafe isn't a campaign or a program.**

**It's not an initiative or a reaction.**

**It's a philosophy that is deeply embedded in Leadpoint's core values.**

We want our employees to embrace the idea that Leadpoint's safety program isn't for our benefit, it's for them and their families. Safety is most successful when it comes from intrinsic motivation, not from external demands.

There are four LiveSafe principles.

**1 – Safety First.** Safety is a way of life, not just something to think about at work.

**2 – See Something? Say Something.** This is the idea behind giving Stop Work Authority to every Leadpoint employee. Protect yourself and others by telling someone when you see something that's unsafe.

**3 – Follow the Rules.** Safety rules and regulations are designed to keep everyone safe. Knowing and obeying the rules will help every employee LiveSafe.

**4 – Teamwork.** Everyone is responsible for their own safety and that of their co-workers.

We believe LiveSafe and its principles creates greater awareness of safe behavior and hazards at work and at home. It creates a safer environment for all.





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*The goal of LiveSafe is to connect employees with safety on a personal level.*



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# What it Means to LiveSafe

*By Terrence Patterson, Leadpoint Onsite Manager*

Poor decisions about safety put you, your team and their families at risk.

That's the first lesson I took away from a safety symposium in Green Bay, Wisconsin, sponsored by the [American Society of Safety Professionals](#). The event featured motivational safety speaker [Eric Giguere](#) who shared his terrifying story of being buried alive and the poor decisions that led-up to his experience.

As I listened to Giguere's story, I immediately saw the parallels to MRF safety.

## **COMPLACENCY CAN KILL**

In my role as an onsite manager, I learned three things from Giguere that I've applied to my team and my site.

### **1. Don't become complacent.**

At Giguere's job, the team got stuck doing things the way a former manager thought was safe. They didn't evolve or continue learning. Things went well day after day, and everything looked great. Until they didn't. A situation occurred that the team wasn't prepared or trained to handle. Someone made a decision to do something unsafe and it put Giguere and the team in danger.

Safety can't be an "every now and then" thing. How to live safe must be continuously reinforced. You have to remind folks every day that what they do affects everyone.

### **2. Teamwork is essential.**

The decisions we make about safety on the job affect us as individuals. They also affect our team, customers and vendors, our family members, and the families of everyone on the team.

Safety at home must also be part of the equation. When a team member is injured at home, they're lost to the team as well. As team members, we must live, work, think and act safely in everything we do. No exceptions.



### **3. No shortcuts.**

In the moment, taking a shortcut may not seem like a big deal. It's just one time, may save a few minutes, and who will notice? That mentality is a recipe for disaster. Bale safety is a great example.

It's everyone's responsibility on the baling floor and storage areas to be aware as they're walking around. It's easy to make mistakes in moving and stacking bales; there's a lot of pressure in that job. I tell my team, If you see a bale that looks improper, take immediate action. If you see an improperly stacked bale and it falls, it will almost certainly cause a fatality and that becomes something you will have to live with every day.

If you see something, say something. Think of yourself and the team. That's another principle of Leadpoint's LiveSafe philosophy.

### **SAFETY: HIRING & RETENTION**

I've always felt that it's important to hire for character and train for skill. That approach works in many environments including MRFs.

Having experience in a specific role doesn't mean an individual will fit on the team, share the values of the company, help us achieve our goals, and embrace safety.

Once the right person is identified, a great onboarding experience is the most important step to ensuring they are productive and stay on the job. At Leadpoint, we look for people who are passionate about producing a great final product. We hire people who take their work seriously. And we want people who understand how to fulfill their role safely.

At my site, our new hire training program extends well beyond the first day or week on the job. We pair every new hire with a buddy who helps them learn the job, see the value in what they do, and build a sense of pride. This approach gives the buddy group a deeper sense of teamwork and commitment to the job.

Sorters are the most important people in the plant. If they don't care and aren't trained, we not only produce a sub-standard product, we also don't have buyers. And without thorough, ongoing safety training, the entire recycling program is at risk.

### **SAFETY EQUALS PREPAREDNESS**

In the end, to Live Safe means to prepare. Set the team up for safe work habits with continuous training and the most modern approaches. Make safety part of the onboarding process and ensure that every employee is motivated to work well, smart and safe. And have a plan for the worst-case scenario.



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## CHAPTER TWO

# *ABCs of Safety*

**LEADPOINT**

*High Performance Work Teams.*



# The ABCs of Safety

*Simple. Easy. Effective.*

An effective MRF safety culture depends on quickly, easily and consistently engaging the workforce in safe behavior. This is a challenge for nearly every MRF we've worked with since Leadpoint was founded in 2000.

With so many competing priorities, like production, quality, revenue and expense, how can we ensure that the safety message is woven into the fabric of every employee's daily duties?

We can train them on the latest and greatest safety models like Swiss Cheese, FRAM, STAMP, and others that have come and gone over the years.

However, safety theory can be complicated. There has to be a better way to get general hazard recognition and safety concepts to "stick" with employees.

## **Know the A-B-Cs**

We want our MRF workforce to focus on the basics: their Safety A-B-Cs. Leadpoint developed this model several years ago and has seen it work in many MRF environments.

## **A – Activate Your Brain**

MRF employees can't sleepwalk through the job and be safe. They need to **THINK ABOUT SAFETY at all times.**

As managers, we need to find those things that "activate" our employee's brains, like daily safety meetings, incentive programs, stretching programs, or communications.

Every leader and worksite is unique, and every work group responds differently to these motivational concepts.

Our advice: let the employees tell you what gets their attention. The best way to find out is to involve them in the process. Ask them directly, "What do you think would help you think about safety throughout the day?"

The workforce will come up with the most creative and effective ideas! If an individual or local safety committee comes up with the idea, it will have more grassroots support. It will help the team OWN their personal safety.

## **B – Be Aware of Your Hazards**

Managers need to explain to their team that we make hazard assessments all the time.

- That light just turned yellow – can I make it or not?
- That box sure looks heavy – can I lift it myself or should I get help?
- What will the boss say if it takes too long to get this job done?
- The guard is missing on that piece of equipment – what if I got my hand in there?

We must establish a culture of hazard assessment. It starts by teaching people the routine hazards they are likely to face and then progressing to identifying new hazards as they present themselves.

We must provide a safe way for employees to report unsafe conditions and unsafe actions. If we act on their concerns and reward them for their hazard identification, a culture of reporting will blossom.

Conversely, if we fail to act or react negatively, that culture will wither, and we will continue to be surprised by the things we find during our own site assessments.

If you've ever said to yourself during an investigation, "Why didn't someone tell us that this was a problem?" it's time to take a hard look at the culture that's worked against hazard reporting.

## **C – Control Your Hazards**

Once your team is actively looking for hazards, how do you implement solutions, control hazards, and create a safer workplace?

**Job Specific Training.** Teach the team the specific hazards they may face with each task. For example, if they are a screen cleaner, they should understand how to execute lock out / tag out.

**Stop-Work Authority.** This is critical for empowering employees and driving safety. When employees have true stop-work authority, they can call "Time Out" and take control of the situation.

## **A Productive Safety Outcome**

When a site embraces the A-B-Cs approach to safety, their employees will build a deeper understanding of what safety is all about and their role in ensuring a safer environment for everyone. It doesn't take a seminar, OSHA class or college degree. It takes communication and commitment to build a safety culture.

The A-B-Cs of Safety is something any employee can understand and work with.



## CHAPTER ONE

# *Safety Committees*

# Building a Safety Committee

*We all have the same goal: keeping employees safe.*

Safety is the most personal practice at any MRF. Every employee is subject to the hazards of the job site, can experience pain and injury, and makes choices about behaving safely.

A MRF's safety culture is built on behaviors that everyone knows and believes in. It's "the way we do things around here" combined with common attitudes and practices. You can't mandate a safety culture. It has to be nurtured and developed.

At Leadpoint, we believe one key to a strong safety culture is effective safety committees.

## **It Begins with Management**

Safety committees aren't new, but few reach their potential to deliver maximum value for the MRF.

The key is management commitment. The local leader must be willing to not only enable a safety committee, but also to listen to and act on the committee's recommendations.

It's also management's role to give clear direction on the committee's function, goals and expectations.

More than a "check the box" mentality, safety committees are a resource that keeps employees safe.

There are three things that can kill a safety committee.

**1 – Deaf ears.** When a safety committee comes up with ideas, brings them to management, and gets no response, the committee quickly learns that their work doesn't count. Even if the answer is "no" or "not right now," management's responsive is important. Leaders must be willing to listen.

**2 – Prying eyes.** It may seem like a good idea to put managers on the safety committee, but when you put a supervisor or manager on the committee, the employees start to hold back. Committee membership should be employee-based. That means no managers.

**3 – Tight Grip.** Management needs to be ok with relinquishing a certain amount of control and giving the committee members access to data that will help them do their job. Management must be willing to take the committee’s recommendations and act on them (within reason, of course).

### **Grassroots Leadership**

The most effective safety committees include the right employees. Here are seven characteristics to look for.

1. **Willingness to speak up.** The best safety committee members enjoy participating in a group and aren’t afraid to voice their opinions, even if they’re unpopular.
2. **Confidence.** Safety committee members should be confident in their knowledge of the job and the site.
3. **Attention to detail.** Someone who is willing to look beyond the obvious and dig into the details will bring value to a safety committee.
4. **Unofficial Leaders.** Seek out employees who have been part of the team for a while and have the respect of their peers.
5. **Representative.** Safety committee members need to represent the views and ideas of their colleagues. They must be open to hearing differing points of view and able to draw out information from the rest of the group.
6. **Varied.** The most effective safety committees have members from different areas of the operation. Consider sorters, maintenance and equipment operators for a balanced committee.
7. **Ambitious.** While not a requirement, being on a safety committee can open the door to advancement. It gives employees the chance to prove themselves, connect with management, and implement things that make the operation better.

### **End Result**

The safety committee’s efforts must translate to the bottom line. When these teams are operating effectively, management can expect these results.

- 1 – **A reduction in workplace hazards.** Members’ eyes are trained to be on the lookout for safety hazards in the workplace, and they are empowered to correct them.
- 2 – **Fewer injuries.** As you eliminate hazards, improve training and create a culture of safety, a reduction in injuries naturally follows.
- 3 – **Lower workers’ comp costs.** Reduced injuries + fewer claims = lower workers’ comp costs, and that’s a business outcome every MRF wants to see.
- 4 – **Improved productivity and quality.** When employees are engaged as safety committee members or connected through their committee’s representatives, they have a bigger stake in the success of the operation. Watch for improvements in attendance, performance, turnover, and quality once your safety committee gets going.

### **Let’s Get Safer!**

Safety committees are one of the most effective resources a MRF has to improve safety productivity and quality. It takes a little time, management commitment and clear direction, but the benefits gained are well worth the investment.



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*Safety is the most personal practice at any MRF. Every employee is subject to the hazards of the job site.*



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## CHAPTER ONE

# *Hazard Control*

# Hierarchy of Hazard Controls

*A different way to think about safety.*

There is a hierarchy of controls that can help employees recognize and control hazards.

**First: Engineering Controls.** Can we engineer or design the problem away? For example, if there is a fall hazard when performing a maintenance function, can we install a work platform to eliminate the risk?

**Second: Administrative Controls.** What training, policy or procedure can we establish to mitigate the risk? Teach employees proper techniques or establish rules about how to perform certain tasks. This can have a significant impact on safety performance.

**Third: Personal Protective Equipment.** What equipment or gear can be worn to minimize exposure to a hazard? In the recycling environment it's almost impossible to eliminate the risk of debris flying up at the sorters, which is why safety glasses are required.

**More on the Hierarchy of Hazard Controls from Brian Haney**

**What steps do you go through when assessing a hazard?**

Whatever the hazard may be, you should always look at how to control it. Evaluate potential controls from three different angles before deciding how to eliminate or mitigate it. The best solution is an engineering control. Second is administrative control. And third is PPE. The engineering solution isn't always available. If you can't engineer the hazard away, how about a combination of administrative controls and PPE?

### **Can you give an example of a hazard and how this hierarchy might work?**

Noise exposures. Think about a glass breaker in a recycling plant and the high noise level every time bottles break against those metal disks. The easy solution is, "Here are your ear plugs, put those in." That helps mitigate the hazard, except it relies on the employee wearing their ear plugs and putting them in properly and on management remembering to order PPE. This solution reduces the noise exposure, but it doesn't eliminate it. It's a decent control but not the best. There are some situations where PPE may be the best you can do because there aren't any other options. In this example, though, there are other options.

### **Like administrative controls that might reduce the exposure to high noise levels?**

Exactly. If the glass breaker is in one corner of the plant, ideally we want everyone to work in a different corner. But what if they have to work in that area of the plant?

An administrative solution could be job rotation: an employee only works near the glass breaker for two hours and then we rotate them out with somebody else.

### **Is there a downside to relying on administrative controls?**

Yes. You're relying on workers and supervisors to follow the rules. You're not eliminating the hazard you're just mitigating the exposure. The guy who has to work near the glass breaker for two hours still has an exposure; he's still being harmed. It's more effective than simply handing an employee ear plugs, but an engineering control is even better.

### **What would the engineering control look like in this situation?**

Here's an engineering solution I've seen implemented: create a sound-proof enclosure around the glass breaker. Then the workforce can work wherever they want and need to, and the operations team doesn't have to manage job rotation or issue and train on PPE.

### **What is the number one mistake you've seen in safety planning?**

The biggest mistake facilities make is doing nothing. If you're presented with a hazard and nobody has been hurt by it, there's a tendency to minimize it. Unfortunately, you always have to be thinking worst-case scenario. Get proactive and go back to the three steps in the hierarchy: engineering, administrative and PPE controls.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# *Bale Safety*

# The Most Overlooked Hazard

*Best practices for bale safety.*

The most overlooked safety hazard in many MRFs is bale storage. In the last couple of years, there's been a rise in injuries and accidents related to bale storage and handling. With the pressure on product quality, difficulties in finding buyers, and increased inbound tons, bale storage areas are overcrowded and full of employee activity. It is critical that every MRF mitigate the hazards presented by these conditions.

## Improving Bale Storage Safety

Here are three recommendations your MRF can use to improve safety in bale storage areas.

**Limit employee access.** According to **ANSI Z245.41 – 2015 – Section 4.6.5**, bale storage areas should be designated as special work areas, with access limited to authorized personnel only and have clear signage indicating this restriction.

Limit the area to trained and authorized personnel only, typically forklift operators and supervisors. Given the limited space available in some facilities, bale dressers may be working very close to the bale storage area. Be sure that interaction between mobile equipment and personnel is tightly controlled and that bale dressers and forklifts maintain safe distances from each other. Ensure that bales are stored safely so they do not endanger bale dressers or other workers. A falling bale, most weighing well over 1000 pounds, can cause severe injury or even death.

**Safe Storage.** The ANSI Standards **ANSI Z245.41-2015 Section 4.6** provide guidance on bale stacking and industry best practices for bale storage areas. Here are a few highlights.

Bales in a stack should be consistent in composition and shape, and contained by straps, ties or similar devices that suit the size, shape and material of the bale. This is covered in detail in **ANSI 4.6.1**.

Bales should be stacked no more than four high in straight stacks. Bales may be stored higher if they are "stair-stepped" and stacked, blocked, interlocked or limited in height so they are stable and secure. To prevent collapse, loose, incomplete or out-of-shape bales should not be stacked or used to support other bales in the stack. **ANSI 4.6.2** provides specific guidance on bale stacking arrays.

Bales in stacks should be visually inspected daily, with an eye to stability and condition of the bales. Any unstable conditions should be corrected immediately. Learn more in **ANSI 4.6.3**.

Training should be provided about bale content, quality and stacking, and correction and reporting of unstable bale conditions. Remember to include authorized employees and other affected team members in this training. **Reference ANSI 4.6.4** for more.

**Forklift Operators.** Forklift operators should have the authority to stop operations if they see unsafe conditions in the bale storage area, such as unauthorized employees in the area, damaged or off-balance bale stacks, or any other situation that could cause injury or damage. They should also be trained to always be on the lookout for pedestrian traffic.

### **Empowering Employees for Safety**

All employees should have “Stop Work Authority” that allows them to call a time out if they observe, or are asked to perform, work that is unsafe – in bale storage areas or anywhere else in the MRF.

Creating a culture where employees are empowered to act on safety concerns is one of the best ways to reduce injury rates and limit exposure to hazards.

When it comes to bale safety, the bottom line is this: regardless of position or title, it’s up to us as safety leaders to reduce or eliminate hazards from the workplace and ensure that all employees have a safe and healthy work environment. It’s simply good business!



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*A culture where employees are empowered to act on safety issues is the best way to reduce injuries and limit exposure to hazards.*



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## CHAPTER SIX

# *Safety Inspections*



# The First 30 Seconds

## *What the safety inspector sees.*

**Question: How many occupational hazards can an experienced safety professional find within 30 seconds of walking into a recycling plant?**

If plant safety is not being properly managed, the answer is a whole lot.

To a trained eye, a quick visual assessment can reveal serious safety issues. For example, there are certain levels of housekeeping, cleanliness and organization for recycling plants that indicate how well a plant is being run. If there are deficiencies in these areas, it is likely that safety is not being proactively managed.

Here are other safety issues that can be quickly identified:

- Faults in plant design
- Positioning of sort stations
- Slip and fall risks
- Unguarded or poorly guarded machines
- Potential lifting hazards

### **30 SECONDS IS JUST THE BEGINNING**

When safety inspectors uncover issues like these, it's time to dive in deeper.

During an actual inspection, the inspector looks closely for problem areas that could trigger an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigation.

For example, most recycling plants have mobile equipment on the plant floor, including forklifts and skid steers / loaders. If unmanaged, the continuous interaction between people and these machines on a plant floor can create hazardous conditions.

It is critical that plants follow lockout/tagout (LOTO) standards to protect employees from serious injury.

An inspector will look for proper lighting and ventilation inside the building. He will ask what the procedures are for managing spills, leaks, damaged goods and hazardous waste. He will inquire about steps being taken to prevent combustion and dangerous chemical exposure.

## **GEAR AND PERSONAL EQUIPMENT**

Proper PPE is essential. What are workers wearing? Do they have the right kind of gloves? Are they wearing earplugs, hard hats, safety glasses, and steel-toed boots? These safety items are the industry standard and should be firmly enforced by onsite operations managers.

If your plant is falling short in any of these areas, you should address them as soon as possible. Safety is for the health and benefit of your workers, and the organization.

## CONCLUSION

# *Meet the Author*



# Brian Haney

## *Leadpoint's Safety Leader*

*Brian Haney is Vice President, Safety & Compliance, at Leadpoint, the expert in providing operational support and execution to MRF operators across the country.*

*Brian brings more than 20 years of environmental, health and safety practice to his role at Leadpoint. For the last 15 years, he has focused exclusively on safety and environmental leadership in the recycling industry. Prior to that, Brian worked in a safety and compliance roles for an international chemical distributor and as a consultant.*

*Brian has a bachelor's degree in industrial technology and a master's degree in hazardous materials and waste management, both from Arizona State University. He is a member of the American Society of Safety Engineers and the National Waste and Recycling Association.*

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*MRF employees need to know they can't sleepwalk through this job and be safe. They need to think about safety at all times.*



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**GET SAFE. LIVE SAFE.**

Contact Brian and the Leadpoint team for a complimentary site safety assessment.

Ask how Leadpoint can reduce chaos at your MRF with its high-performance work team model.

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