

Grey Wolf's truck safety program reduces incidents

TRANSPORTING LAND RIGS can be every bit as dangerous as drilling a well unless the trucking crew is aware of the potential hazards. Genuine support of a safety culture from the very top ranks of the company is as crucial to eliminating accidents as safety training itself. As a result of this philosophy, **Grey Wolf Drilling** has implemented several procedures in its trucking division that has resulted in an 80% reduction in recordable incidents during the past year, from five in 2003 to one in 2004.

Part of Grey Wolf's safety philosophy is to let its expectations be known to everyone when it comes to safe rig moving practices. As a result, the company has implemented leadership training for its trucking superintendents as well as safety meetings, STOP programs and extensive truck inspections.

"The biggest bang for our buck has been to let our expectations be known, then working with our supervisors as to what our standards are and pushing it down to our drivers and swampers," said **Dave Mathews**, Superintendent for Grey Wolf Trucking. "If you have unsafe equipment and expect people to use it, you can expect them to operate in an unsafe manner."

Grey Wolf operates a fleet of 69 rig moving trucks, generally split between its South Texas and Shreveport divisions.

SAFETY EXPECTATIONS

Grey Wolf has a set of safety standards when it comes to moving its land rigs, and it expects its employees to not only know and understand the standards but the reason for the standards. "We expect people to follow those rules, policies and procedures," Mr Mathews said. "You can look back at any incident or accident and the reason for them is your basic safety culture, or lack of one."

He also explained that a company can eliminate incidents and accidents by making expectations known and holding people accountable who are not following the basic safety rules, practices, policies and procedures.

"If you tell people that it is not okay to hurt each other, it is not okay to damage equipment, and if they take that seriously, it becomes a part of the culture and you can see your incidents and accidents begin to go away.

"On the other hand," he continued, "it is not enough to tell people that we are doing better but we can do better next year. You have to tell them that none of it is acceptable. That is what making your expectations known is all about."

SAFETY PROGRAMS

Grey Wolf utilizes a Job Safety Analysis (JSA) process that is audited and reviewed for effectiveness. The contractor has increased its truck inspections and, importantly, takes those inspections seriously. The company sends the message that it is serious about safety and the upkeep of its equipment to result in safe operations, resulting in significantly fewer incidents and accidents.

The JSA results in all of the trucking division employees as well as the rig crews being on the same page and working together. "They know what operation will take place next," Mr Mathews said. "That result is gained through the JSA process."

Grey Wolf's truck inspections are more than merely inspecting the chassis and cab. It also includes the working components. Mr Mathews drove a truck in the industry for a number of years, and knows there are some trucks that are questionable with regards to safe equipment.

"I saw the need for good vehicle inspections that include more than just wheels and engines," he explained. "We do a full inspection that includes slings, chains, winches, etc."

Grey Wolf's truck pushers follow a form that outlines the particular equipment to be inspected. If anything is observed that needs repair, it is noted and the company arranges for repairs to be made. A follow-up inspection is conducted to ensure that repairs have been made.

The company also utilizes a safety observation program in its trucking division that is similar to a STOP program, allowing an employee to halt an operation if an unsafe practice is observed.

"An important result from this type of program is that people begin to communicate with each other," Mr Mathews said. "They feel safer by asking another person not to do something that is unsafe, and you can get them to respond in a positive way.

"It's a good positive reinforcement," he continued. "The real value of the STOP program is getting people to communicate through the process."

The company also attributes a low employee turnover rate for its success in incident reductions. The company experiences a somewhat higher turnover rate in its Shreveport division compared to its South Texas division, however, the core group of employees remains the same. Consequently, Grey Wolf has been working with that core group to push its safety message and expectations down through the ranks.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Grey Wolf's leadership training for its supervisors has also had a tremendous impact in increasing safety awareness, Mr Mathews noted. While it is difficult at times to provide leadership training for the entire trucking crews, the company's supervisors have all been through the training, and it is Grey Wolf's intention that all of the trucking division's employees will eventually attend the same type of leadership training courses.

The trucking division's employees all receive some safety and leadership training, some of which is provided at a monthly safety meeting conducted by various supervisors or truck pushers or by Mr Mathews himself.

Topics covered include securing loads, overhead wires and oversize load procedures among others. A certain amount of this training is provided during every safety meeting.

The trucking division also conducted a weeklong job safety training workshop. Additionally, all of the division's employees have attended a 1 ½ day course on supervising for safety.

"The leadership training has made a tremendous impact on our safety record," Mr Mathews noted. "It has impacted the supervisors in terms of what they see in the field and how they handle different situations.

"Our business line calls for a lot of moving around and a lot of activity," he continued. "The truck pushers are challenged to focus on the big picture versus one task. They know the consequences of not doing things correctly." ■