

AMES LABORATORY
SAFETY CULTURE SURVEY REPORT
AUGUST, 2010

Introduction

To fulfill a performance measure defined in the Ames Laboratory operating contract, Environment, Safety, Health & Assurance (ESH&A) administered a safety survey to assess select aspects of the Laboratory's current safety culture including operational aspects of the safety program.

Methodology

ESH&A personnel devised the survey after consulting a variety of sources including other DOE safety culture surveys. A total of 15 questions were defined that were either indicators of employee perception of the current safety culture or direct feedback on current operational aspects of the safety program. Each question had 6 response categories: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree, or have not observed. Questions were as follows:

- 1) The Ames Laboratory takes the time to identify, assess and correct the identified risks associated with its operations.**
- 2) Laboratory management encourages reporting safety discrepancies without negative repercussions.**
- 3) My work group has enough experienced personnel to operate safely.**
- 4) The Ames Laboratory ensures that all employees are responsible and accountable for safe operations.**
- 5) I get answers to my questions and/or concerns about safety.**
- 6) Within the Ames Laboratory, good safety related communication flow exists up and down the chain.**
- 7) Safety education and training opportunities are adequate at the Laboratory.**
- 8) I am comfortable stopping work if I see an unsafe work practice.**
- 9) My co-workers encourage me to comply with standard operating procedure and/or safety rules.**
- 10) My supervisor encourages my work group to be safety conscious and follow rules.**
- 11) The ESH&A office is effective in promoting safety.**
- 12) The Ames Laboratory provides a positive atmosphere that promotes safe operations.**
- 13) Laboratory leadership is actively involved in the safety program and management of safety issues.**
- 14) I have seen safe work procedures fairly and consistently enforced.**
- 15) I believe that the Ames Laboratory is a safe place to work.**

Three (3) additional open-ended questions were included and were as follows:

- 16) What do you see as the greatest benefit of ESH&A services?**
- 17) How could ESH&A improve its services?**
- 18) Is there an issue or issues you would like to see ESH&A spend more time addressing?**

The survey was compiled in Survey Monkey and distributed via e-mail on June 4th 2010 to Laboratory personnel. Responses were accepted for approximately 3 weeks after initial publication; a reminder e-mail was sent approximately 1 week prior to the close of the survey.

Results

A total of 164 employees (~ 30% of paid staff) responded to the survey with approximately 2/3 being research staff.

The overall responses to the first 15 questions were positive with an average of 84.8% of respondents answering either “agree” or “strongly agree” with a range of 100-72.9%. The three highest overall responses received (with percent responding either “agree” or “strongly agree”) were as follows:

The Ames Laboratory takes the time to identify, assess and correct the identified risks associated with its operations (100%)

Safety education and training opportunities are adequate at the Laboratory (90.6%)

The ESH&A office is effective in promoting safety (90.2%)

The three questions with the highest negative responses (percent responding either “disagree” or “strongly disagree”), although below 10%, were as follows:

Within the Ames Laboratory, good safety related communication flow exists up and down the chain (9.4%)

Laboratory management encourages reporting safety discrepancies without negative repercussions (7.0%)

I have seen safe work procedures fairly and consistently enforced (6.2%)

Responses to the three open-ended questions were grouped according to major themes where possible. Themes identified (examples given) are as follows:

What do you see as the greatest benefit provided by ESH&A's services?

38 responses received: 13 related to training (good training on hazard prevention, training reminders, good training materials), 8 related to quality of ESH&A staff (friendly, helpful staff, willing to work with all personnel, constant support), 7 related to effective communication of safety information (effective communication through Safety Coordinators, prompt/knowledgeable responses), 10 miscellaneous.

How could ESH&A improve its services?

22 responses received: 6 related to training (more on-line information & training, ensure training accounts for cultural differences, reduce redundant training), 4 related to communication (better dissemination of policies/procedures, more lessons learned), 3 related to communication (ensure communication flows up and down organization), 2 related to walkthroughs (don't announce in advance), 7 miscellaneous.

Is there an issue or issues you would like to see ESH&A spend more time addressing? (NOTE: Consistent themes were difficult to discern)

10 responses received: 2 related to training (more hands on demonstrations, greater efforts to reduce redundant training), 2 related to expanded waste disposal and/or recycling efforts, better street crossings, reducing fear of repercussions when something is reported as an accident, consistent enforcement of rules regarding food in labs, management buy-in to encourage/invest in ergonomic workstations/chairs across lab, ensuring material compatibility of chemical storage bottles, encouraging employees to become more safe.

Discussion

The term “culture” is defined in DOE M 450.4-1 Integrated Safety Management Manual as follows:

“An organization’s system of commonly held values and beliefs that influence the attitudes, choices and behaviors of the individuals of the organization.”

The purpose of the survey was to gather data that would allow management to assess “culture” in the context of safety and, more specifically, as it applies to implementation of the Laboratory’s Integrated Safety Management System (ISMS).

In general, the results show a strong perception of safety culture and a high degree of satisfaction with the services provided by ESH&A. The average positive response rate of 84.8% to the first 15 questions is noteworthy; the responses to the question on the “benefits of ESH&A” received the highest number of responses (38) of any open-ended question. The two questions that received the highest positive response rate (“The Ames Laboratory takes time to identify, assess and correct the identified risks associated with its operation” and “Safety education and training opportunities are adequate at the Laboratory.”) both suggest that employees are 1) aware of the Laboratory’s efforts to identify and mitigate hazards and 2) recognize the value of the safety training currently being offered. This high level of employee awareness of and alignment with the Laboratory’s principal safety elements is an indicator of a robust safety culture.

The survey results also suggest areas that might be assessed for improvement. The two questions that received the highest negative response rate (“Within Ames Laboratory, good safety related communication flow exists up and down the chain.” and “Laboratory management encourages reporting safety discrepancies without negative repercussions.”) both deal with the issue of communication. ESH&A continues to examine mechanisms by which safety information is communicated throughout the organization, encourage employees to report incidents, and to reduce the perception of “negative repercussions”.

Specific [survey results](#) are available for review, and if you have questions about this report, contact:

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