

FACES OF



Knowledge is Power...

And when it comes to safety, more is better

As the old axiom goes, “knowledge is power.” No one really knows the origin of this saying, but its first print debut in the tenth century gives the second half of the quote: “Knowledge is power, and it can command obedience.” When it comes to safety, knowing – and obeying – guidelines is critical. . . particularly when those guidelines are under the auspices of regulatory agencies OSHA, DOT, EPA and DHS.

These agencies all have comprehensive requirements to help mitigate health, safety and environmental risks within agricultural retail businesses and ensure the safety of employees and the public.

Navigating the hundreds of regulations that pertain to an ag business doesn’t have to be overwhelming. According to Sharon

Cunningham, Environmental Health and Safety Manager with the Alabama Farmers Cooperative (AFC), one resource takes all that regulatory information and turns it into power for ag retail operations.

ResponsibleAg offers powerful knowledge

ResponsibleAg is an industry initiative that helps member organizations and facilities ensure they are compliant with regulations

from OSHA, EPA, DOT and DHS. It offers a systematic approach to facility evaluation, recommendations for improvements and a comprehensive collection of resources members can turn to for information and education. The primary goal is ensuring the proper storage and handling of farm input supplies to keep employees, customers and communities safe.



SHARON CUNNINGHAM
Environmental Health and Safety Manager,
Alabama Farmers Cooperative



Training is key for personnel at each facility. Putting information in the hands of the people doing the work imparts knowledge, which becomes the real power to keep employees, customers and communities safe.

As one of AFC’s ResponsibleAg-credentialed auditors, Cunningham focuses on safety, and her training as an auditor has made her job easier. When she walks into a facility to complete an audit, she is equipped with the ResponsibleAg Assessment, a checklist of regulations governing each aspect of that location. Whether it’s forklift operations, proper ag chemical storage, or up-to-date fire extinguishers, Cunningham is ready.

“Audits can seem overwhelming — another thing to keep up with. But when managers see how it works, they are open to it,” says Cunningham. “By completing the audit, managers see how well they are already performing in many areas. In areas that need work, the audit provides a clear understanding of the regulation and what must be done to become compliant.”

Seeing is believing

Cunningham frequently turns to the ResponsibleAg Compliance Assistance Library when helping facility personnel understand agency information.

“The library lists all the regulations and puts them in plain English so everyone can understand,” says Cunningham.

Roger Waller, Environmental Health and Safety Manager for Agri-AFC, echoes Cunningham’s statements.

“The ResponsibleAg assessment gives us a tool to use with the facility, to explain the regulations and the recommended processes — why they must do a certain task a certain way. It’s not just ‘Roger said to do it that way’. The assessment keeps the facts front and center.”

Understanding “why” often makes a powerful difference. Being able to show a manager the exact regulation governing safe handling and storage of farm input supplies takes out all the guess work.

“It can be an eye-opening experience,” says Waller. “Many times, people have a lot of knowledge about a particular subject, but when you show them the regulations, they realize there is still more to learn.”

Cunningham agrees. “The audit process also shows the facility how inter-

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— Roger Waller

locked all the governing agencies really are.” The regulations all work together.

Training unlocks the power in the information

Waller believes training is key for both auditors and personnel at each facility. He is one of the first class of ResponsibleAg-trained auditors.

“Whether you want to be an auditor or not, the auditor training shows you how you are supposed to be doing things. I thought I knew a lot before I went. But I learned a whole lot more. I wish we would have had this 30 years ago,” Waller says.

Cunningham also believes the training is one of the program’s greatest assets. “Knowing what resources are out there to help you understand specific regulations

is great. Prior knowledge of what you can be asked when government agencies visit your facilities is also very helpful,” she says.

As auditors, Waller and Cunningham use the audit process as an opportunity to train facility managers and safety personnel, who, in turn, use this knowledge to educate employees.

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knowledge, which becomes the real power to keep employees, customers and communities safe.

Joining ResponsibleAg is easy. Simply visit www.ResponsibleAg.org or call 270-683-6777 for more information and to sign up. ✓



ROGER WALLER
Environmental Health and Safety Manager,
Agri-AFC

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ResponsibleAg is an industry-led initiative **committed** to helping agribusinesses properly store and handle farm input supplies. The program helps members ensure they are **compliant** with environmental, health, safety and security regulations to keep employees, customers and our communities **safe**.



Headquartered in northern Alabama on the Tennessee River, Alabama Farmers Cooperative has served farmers since 1936 and has grown to include farm, home and feed; grain, crop input, aquaculture, horticulture, wildlife and cotton ginning operations.