



# ResponsibleAg Goes Far Beyond Regulatory Compliance

Not consistently enforcing safety glasses policy nearly cost employee's eyesight

When the phone call came, reality hit Billy Pirkle like a bulldozer. A chemist by education and plant manager at a roofing fasteners company early in his career, Pirkle remembered his focus was on process efficiency – making better quality products with less expense.

But the call immediately changed Pirkle's focus to employee safety.

Roosevelt Merritt, shipping foreman at the plant, had been hit in the face by metal pieces. It wasn't good – a detached retina in one eye and a torn retina in the other. Merritt had been a high school basketball standout, maybe talented enough to

play Division I or II ball. Even though he didn't go on to play at the college level, basketball was his passion. He found great joy in teaching his two young sons everything he knew about the game.

Was that joy going to be stripped from this man because Pirkle had encouraged, but not consistently enforced, the plant's policy that safety glasses be worn?

## Gut-wrenching experience ignites passion to put safety first

Pirkle says it was very emotional to realize the injuries could have been prevented if the safety glasses policy had been followed. He still gets emotional, telling the story.

"As I thought about the fact that Roosevelt might not be able to see again, that he might not be able to do the things he enjoyed in life, it hit me hard," Pirkle says. "It ignited my passion for safety and people."

That passion has served Pirkle well during a nearly 30-year career in various environment, health and safety (EHS) leadership roles. In 2018, he retired from his global EHS responsibilities with Crop Production Services, Inc., now Nutrien Ag Solutions, and launched Pirkle Solutions, Inc., pro-



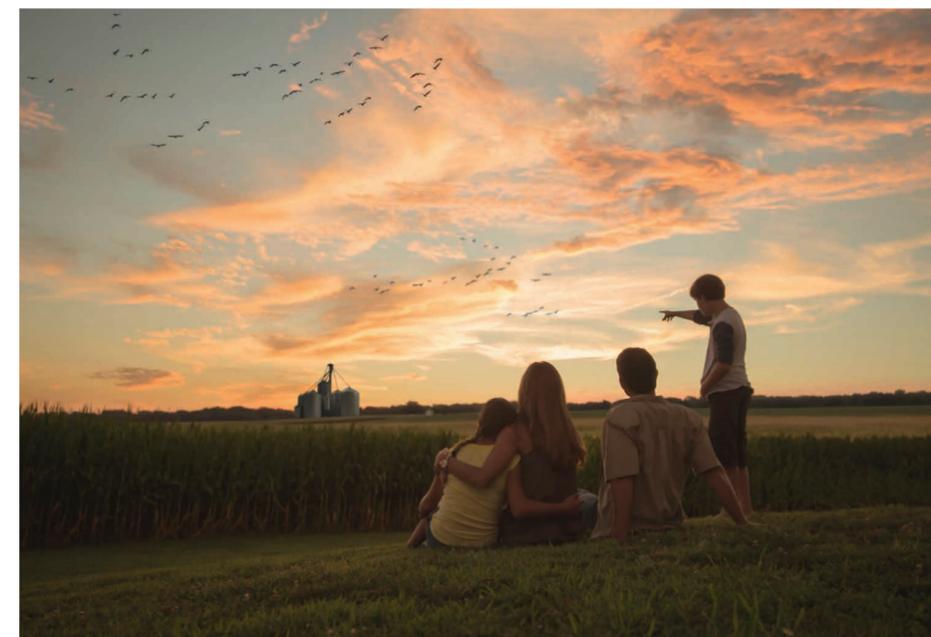
ResponsibleAg offers resources retail facility managers can use to achieve regulatory compliance and train employees about safe practices that help prevent accidents from happening.

viding expertise in regulatory compliance, operational management and agency interaction supporting the crop production industry.

Pirkle also is a committed volunteer, who served on the ResponsibleAg board of directors and is now chairman of its technical committee as well as a ResponsibleAg-credentialed auditor. He believes ResponsibleAg is an important asset to help small, independent ag retailers achieve regulatory compliance and ensure the safety of employees.

## ResponsibleAg is a resource to help prevent incidents

"In farm country, you don't have



Every manager wants employees to go home safe to their families at the end of the day.

to look far to find a friend, neighbor or relative who has been injured working in agriculture," Pirkle says as he notes the missing tip of his finger. "I won't say that we can get to zero, but accidents can be prevented.

"ResponsibleAg is a unique resource within our industry for organizations that don't have full-time EHS personnel. It is a tool location managers can use as a baseline. The audit identifies areas for improvement. And the resulting action plan provides information and tools to make corrections and educate employees, so the facility is compliant and employees are safer," he says. Pirkle points out the \$150 annual fee is significantly less than some retailers invest in employee travel or other incentives. And many corrective actions cost little or nothing.

## When it comes to safety, don't let experience be your teacher

Pirkle's experience in the fasteners manufacturing plant was lifechanging for him and nearly lifechanging for his employee. Experience can be a cruel teacher, and it can be tough on a business's reputation in the community, especially a



J. BILLY PIRKLE  
President of Pirkle Solutions, Inc., Windsor, CO

central and highly visible business like an ag retailer.

"The other thing I've experienced is a fish kill after product leaked from a tank into a stream, then a larger tributary and a lake," Pirkle says. The state Department of Agriculture and Department of Environmental Quality shut down the streams and the lake for fishing and water sports. The entire community was impacted.

"In this instance, everyone in the community knew our company, and it wasn't in a positive way," Pirkle says.

That unfortunate leak is another example of something that may have been prevented by being proactive and following ResponsibleAg's systematic program of audits, corrective action and certification.

"If we use the resources of ResponsibleAg to train employees, enforce safe practices and actively work to prevent accidents from happening, then we'll have fewer of them. And more people will go home safe to their families at the end of the day," Pirkle says.

To learn more about using ResponsibleAg resources to make your facility safer or to become a member, visit [www.ResponsibleAg.com](http://www.ResponsibleAg.com) or call 270.683.6777.

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## MISSION

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**.

