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The McGregor Company Aims for 100% Safety and Compliance

Subjective internal safety audit program replaced with ResponsibleAg consistency

Clark Capwell, General Manager of Environmental Health, Safety and Security for The McGregor Company, has worked for the large independent fertilizer, agrichemical and equipment dealer for nearly 42 years. Based in Colfax, WA, The McGregor Company has 37 retail locations throughout Oregon, Idaho and Washington and hundreds of employees across several divisions. Safety is paramount for everyone.



CLARK CAPWELL
General Manager,
Environmental,
Health, Safety &
Security

Capwell conducts all the audits of his company's many facilities and is as close as you can get to being a professional safety auditor with decades of experience. Capwell supported ResponsibleAg from its founding, attending the first auditor training at the Ford B. West Center for Responsible Agriculture in Owensboro, KY, in 2014. He also serves on the ResponsibleAg board, the ResponsibleAg Technical Committee and other industry committees, including the Far West Agribusiness Association Safety Committee.

"I had a strong feeling from the very beginning that ResponsibleAg was the right thing for us and for the industry," he says.

ResponsibleAg is an industry-led initiative committed to helping agribusinesses ensure they are compliant with environmental, health, safety and security regulations to keep employees, customers and communities safe. It offers a systematic approach to facility evaluation, including a facility audit conducted by a ResponsibleAg-credentialed auditor like Capwell, recommendations for improvements and a comprehensive collection of resources members can turn to for information and education.

ResponsibleAg audits an improvement over internal audits

The McGregor Company already had an internal safety audit program before joining ResponsibleAg. But this program had become unwieldy and cumbersome over time as more and more detail was added, making many components difficult to easily assess and, Capwell admits, subjective, too.

"In audits, more often than not, subjectivity is bad news," he says. The ResponsibleAg checklist is not subjective, consistently addressing federal regulatory requirements applicable to the storage and handling of all fertilizer and agricultural input supplies. Auditors like Capwell credentialed through ResponsibleAg use this checklist to assess compliance with federal regulations at each participating facility.



Hazardous waste operations and emergency response training at The McGregor Company main office. Employee Dean Wigen provides guidance to trainees on proper methods of suiting up.

ABOVE: The McGregor Company has completed ResponsibleAg audits at all but one of its 37 retail locations in Oregon, Idaho and Washington.



The McGregor Company conducts spring wheat seeding research to evaluate seed performance and quality, always with safety in mind.

"If you let yourself settle for something less than 100%, the bar just keeps dropping. Whether we're talking about The McGregor Company or the industry in general, we have to make the perception of ag as positive as possible." — Clark Capwell

These audits, coupled with the transparency of the program, help confirm that the company is consistently doing the right thing, he says.

Today, all but one of the company's registered locations has been audited. That sole standout will receive its first audit in June 2020. Many McGregor locations are in or near their second certification period. Participating facilities are assessed by a credentialed ResponsibleAg auditor every three years to maintain certification. Capwell says he rarely finds violations noted on the ResponsibleAg Significant Issues list.

The firm's large and growing seed business presents its own set of challenges. The safety focus in seed production shifts from storing and handling materials like anhydrous ammonia to large machines used in seed processing and handling – often with many moving parts, requiring eye and hand protection, machine guarding and even hard hats.

Employee involvement improves understanding

Directly involving employees in the audit of their respective areas gives them a greater understanding of what needs to be accomplished and why, Capwell says, as well as a better understanding of regulatory and

safety expectations at all levels. Employee involvement also means needed corrective actions are completed more quickly.

His goal? 100% compliance. "While I believe it's difficult for any business to be 100% compliant 100% of the time, it has to be the goal," Capwell says. "If you let yourself settle for something less, the bar just keeps dropping. Whether we're talking about The McGregor Company or the industry in general, we have to make the perception of ag as positive as possible."

This spirit extends to the community, too. He spent nearly 40 years as a volunteer firefighter and emergency medical technician, gaining experience in hazmat, firefighting and administration, including serving as Chief of Colfax Fire & Rescue. Some of his experiences were less than pleasant and the job often far from glamorous.

But, he says, "A commonly asked question among many volunteer departments is, 'If not me, who?'"

Capwell believes the same applies to everyone in agriculture. Safety and compliance should be considered a personal responsibility.

To learn more about ResponsibleAg or to become a member, visit www.ResponsibleAg.com or call 270.683.6777.

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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**.

