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Solutions for Prioritizing Busy-season Safety

Safety never takes a backseat for The Andersons, thanks to ResponsibleAg



The Andersons is a diversified agribusiness with interests in the grain, ethanol, plant nutrient and rail sectors. Today, 26 of the company's facilities in eight U.S. states are signed up to participate in ResponsibleAg.

Following weeks of nearly constant fieldwork, U.S. farmers and those who supply their agricultural inputs are now catching their collective breath.

While the push to get the crop planted and growing means long days for many, safety remains a top priority for everyone in agriculture — including the 2,500 employees of The Andersons, a diversified agribusiness with interests in the grain, ethanol, plant nutrient and rail sectors.

Anne Cook is Senior Manager for Environmental Health and Safety within The Andersons' Plant Nutrient Group. Cook says that even when things get busy, ensuring employee health and well-being never wavers.

"We hire a lot of seasonal folks this time of year, and it's really easy to forget who does and doesn't have experience," she says. "So, in addition to our policy for required high-visibility clothing, we started using what we call our 'greenhorn' hardhats. These green hardhats are worn by our new and seasonal hires at the facilities.

"I want our facility managers to get a realistic reflection of where their site is at – a good baseline through this audit – and then spend all their time fixing those issues."

– Anne Cook

They are a reminder to managers, supervisors, and employees to not put these new employees in safety-critical jobs until they're fully trained and have some on-the-job experience."

Such simple yet safety-enhancing changes are a product of The Andersons' participation in ResponsibleAg, an industry-led initiative committed to helping agribusinesses ensure compliance with environmental, health, safety (EHS) and security regulations to keep employees, customers and communities safe. The initiative offers a systematic approach to facility evaluation, recommendations for improvements and a comprehensive collection of resources members can turn to for information and education.

Systematic approach to auditing facilities

Cook, who has more than 25 years of experience with EHS compliance, says her company has prioritized the ResponsibleAg Certification Program since it was created in 2014. Currently, 26 facilities in eight states are signed up to participate, representing roughly one-fifth of The Andersons' locations worldwide.



The Andersons' Upper Sandusky, Ohio, wholesale fertilizer manufacturing site completed certification in December 2017. The facility received a Certification kit and an official ResponsibleAg plaque to display.

"We started with facilities that had ammonia and ammonium nitrate because of the heightened level of safety these materials require," Cook says, adding that by the end of 2020, another six facilities have planned safety audits. "We intend to expand to other facilities, such as grain and feed operations where dust can be a hazard."



ANNE COOK
Senior Manager,
Environmental
Health and Safety

No excuses accepted

Like other EHS professionals, Cook says she's heard many reasons not to participate in ResponsibleAg, from the belief that it's only for facilities with ammonium nitrate to the cost and amount of time it requires. However, she encourages her facility managers to focus their time and attention on what happens after an audit occurs.

"This is not a test you can study for, and it's not something I want them trying to plan for at the last minute," Cook says. "I want them to get a realistic reflection of where their site is — a good baseline through this audit — and then spend all their time fixing those issues."

Post-audit improvement is emphasized

Six of The Andersons' sites received audits in the last quarter of 2019, and each averaged 24 safety findings. For example,

that we may have overlooked in the past," she says. "The ResponsibleAg audit is comprehensive and scalable to any agribusiness model."

Assuring the public that safety comes first

Participation in the ResponsibleAg program also allows an organization to show its neighbors that everything is being done in accordance with the highest levels of safety.

"In the agribusiness or fertilizer industries, we know what's happening in our operations, and we can rest easy knowing it's being done right," Cook says. "However, our public, the people who drive by our facilities every day, don't know that."

"From the public's perspective, the ResponsibleAg logo is truly a seal of approval," she continues.

two needs the audits revealed were to better define confined space rescue protocol and to ensure that all four corners of vertical pallet racks were bolted to the floor. Cook says such results validate that there's no one protocol or process that covers every base when it comes to safety.

"Maybe those findings should make me feel bad, but they don't, because now I know we are taking care of those critical safety items

"If they know that somebody has given that facility a look and can endorse it, that is reassuring."

Facilities reaching ResponsibleAg Certification receive materials to help create awareness of their achievement. These include an official ResponsibleAg plaque to display at the facility, a press release that can be personalized with the facility's information and access to marketing materials, merchandise and other tools.

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



Ensuring all four corners of vertical pallet racks are bolted to the floor is an example of findings during ResponsibleAg audits conducted at The Andersons in the last quarter of 2019.

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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**.

