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Veolia's behavioural approach to safety

Environmental services company Veolia has taken a behavioural approach to safety with a program that aims to make a constructive attitude change towards safety. The company behind this program was People and Quality Solutions (PaQS), a training and coaching organisation that specialises in personal performance and development.

The company focuses on each individual staff member being responsible for safety, according to Veolia's WA Training and Development Manager, Nathan Simms.

"Our company focuses heavily on safety and we have the correct systems in place, but we also want to build safety awareness from the top down and the bottom up. That's why we like the coaching process that PaQS uses. Participants play an active role and see how they contribute to the bigger picture. It shows them that everyone is responsible for safety," said Simms.

Veolia employs about 450 people in WA. During its training sessions, PaQS safety psychologists train company representatives as safety coaches, who then return to their organisations to implement specialised safety training. There are currently four Veolia people going through this coaching process whose main roles are as compliance officers or safety advisors, so the coaching complements this.

"After analysing our incident rates, there is definitely evidence that they have decreased. We've also seen a much higher awareness of safety," said Simms.

"Our workforce is spread throughout the state and is a diverse bunch. In our Geraldton waste division where the participants are from a variety of backgrounds, the program was very well received." he added.

As a result of the program's success in Western Australia, other states are now engaging in the PAQS program. Attitudes can change and that's exactly what his programs do, according to PaQS Managing Director, Carl Reams.

"Most attitudes change over time. Even strongly held or deeply ingrained attitudes can change. You don't have all the same attitudes now as you did when you were a children or a teenager. Experience and exposure to people and ideas shape and reinforce beliefs and attitudes. New ideas and experiences, if presented in the right way, will serve to enhance, develop or modify existing attitudes," Reams said.

"People will willingly adopt new information, beliefs and attitudes very quickly when it's presented in the right way for the right reason. If they can see how it will benefit them individually, they're far more likely to cooperate," he added.