

Soccer's penalty system works for safety



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How do you enforce safety violations with predominantly Hispanic crews? At Greenscape, Inc., in Holly Springs, North Carolina, Safety Officer Leslie Herndon, CLT, realized that her company's crew members needed a very visual system they could easily understand.

"A lot of them don't speak English, and they don't all necessarily even read Spanish,"

Herndon says. "Our commercial

production maintenance manager said that our guys were really into the World Cup, and they're all into soccer."


So Greenscape, which also wanted a system that was easy for supervisors to implement in the field, turned to soccer (or "fútbol" in Spanish) for the answers. The company is now using wallet-sized yellow cards and red cards to enforce safety violations.

"Our guys all know what the penalties are in soccer," Herndon explains. "For penalties in the game, they caution players with yellow cards. When players get red cards, they are pulled out of the game." A soccer player will be shown a yellow card for any of seven "cautionable" offenses. Among them are: delaying the restart of play, entering the field of play without the referee's permission, or showing dissent by word or action. A player will be shown a red card and must leave the vicinity of the field for any of seven more serious offenses. Red-card offenses are: being guilty of violent conduct, being guilty of serious foul play, or using offensive, insulting, or abusive language.

Greenscape's yellow cards can fit into a pocket or cup holder in a truck. Whenever anyone spots a safety violation, they write on the card which violation it is, the name of the violator, the date, and their own name. Crew members can give violations to other crew members, crew leaders, or other managers. Everyone can use the cards.

After receiving a certain number of yellow cards in a month, the violator then receives a red card. The yellow cards serve as documented verbal warnings. Red cards result in disciplinary action; they are attached to a written disciplinary form and placed in the employee's personnel file.

Because Greenscape recently started the program, it hasn't yet decided how many yellow cards will result in a red card. One reason Herndon likes this system is because it's flexible, and the company can increase or reduce the amount of time in which a certain number of yellow cards results in a red card.

"I believe that this will be a much more effective and easier way to communicate with our employees about their deficiencies regarding safety and will be much simpler for our supervisors to implement," Herndon says. "Currently, our warning sheets are not readily available on job sites and take time to complete, usually after the person is back at the shop. This causes a lot of verbal warnings but no documentation to back them up." 

If you have a safety tip that you would like to share, please contact Barbara Mulhern at (608) 848-3758 or barbmulhern@landcarenetwork.org.



Employees at Greenscape receive yellow cards as "warnings" for safety violations. The Hispanic employees readily understand the meaning of a yellow card since they are big soccer fans.