

ACHIEVING VPP EXCELLENCE AND SILICA STANDARD COMPLIANCE

Situation

OldCastle Infrastructure is one of North America's largest manufacturers of utility and construction products for telecommunications, energy, transportation, building structures, and water markets. They have 80 locations and nearly 4,000 employees across the United States, and hold safety as their #1 value. As such, they have achieved OSHA Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) Star Site status at several of their locations, including their precast location in Littleton, Colorado.

Challenge

While OldCastle had worked with their insurance provider to monitor various risk levels, they had not performed a comprehensive study on several of the exposure concerns related to their work with concrete, including silica and noise. During an OSHA VPP audit, OldCastle's Industrial Hygiene (IH) program was noted as an area with room for improvement. They were given a one-year extension to their star certification with the condition that they bring their IH program up to VPP standards to remain in the program.

OldCastle wanted to ensure their IH program provided adequate protection for their employees as well as met the requirements to renew their VPP Star Site status. In addition, the June 23, 2018 deadline for compliance with OSHA's Respirable Crystalline Silica Standard was fast approaching and provided a further driver for conducting an in-depth study of their exposure levels.

"The exposure evaluations our insurance company could provide were limited and sporadic. We needed a plant-wide evaluation, particularly with the upcoming deadline for silica. Hellman & Associates is a VPP Star Site themselves, which gave me confidence in their knowledge of both EHS and the rigorous requirements of VPP."

Solution

OldCastle hired Hellman & Associates (H&A) to conduct an evaluation of IH hazards throughout their Littleton facility, perform monitoring based on the findings of the evaluation, and help them work toward a level of excellence surrounding IH.

H&A worked in tandem with OldCastle to develop IH sampling plans and evaluate IH hazards at the Littleton facility. The evaluation measured noise levels, welding fumes, wood dust concentration, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) released by coal tar pitch, and respirable crystalline silica levels. Some of the samples collected came back above acceptable exposure limits for both noise and silica, demanding new engineering controls to reduce employee exposure.

"It was a three-day, plant-wide project which entailed environmental samplings and extensive monitoring of all of our employees, including 60 workers on the floor. Hellman was able to definitively show us where we were doing well and where we needed to do mitigation."

Results

OldCastle was in compliance with OSHA's Silica Standard two months before the compliance deadline and was returned to unconditional VPP Star Site status. The company celebrated by hosting a cookout and proudly raising a new VPP flag.

OldCastle continues on a path of continuous improvement, constantly trying out new engineering controls and equipment to further reduce employee exposure to hazards.

In May of 2018, H&A and OldCastle were invited to speak at the Region VIII VPPPA Conference. H&A consultant Kassey Braun and OldCastle EHS Manager Bobby Vucasovich presented a case study to educate other VPP companies on how they overcame their IH challenges and the controls they put in place to protect their employees and maintain their VPP status.

“It would be hard for me to overstate how well Hellman & Associates was received. We found them to be knowledgeable and energetic. It wasn't an easy task for the employees to be hooked up to machines for four to five hours at a time, but with the friendly yet professional way H&A's consultants handled the evaluation, I didn't get a single complaint.”