

Welcoming OSHA made workplace safer, company says

By Kevin Kelley

WESTLAKE

Aluminum Line Products Company, a Westlake company that makes panels for transportation trailers, was recently recognized by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration for implementing and maintaining a superior safety and health program.

ALPCO becomes one of only 15 companies in Ohio to receive certification through OSHA's Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP).

Normally, OSHA conducts inspections randomly or in response to reports of dangerous working conditions. Under SHARP, an OSHA representative spends two days each month at the company working with company officials on improving safety. If a violation is found, a company participating in SHARP has a period of time to abate the violation. Normally, OSHA would fine the company; OSHA penalties can be as high as \$70,000, depending upon how likely the violation is to result in serious harm to employees.

One benefit of SHARP certification is that the workplace is exempt from OSHA inspections for two years.

However, Martin said that's not the reason companies should consider seeking SHARP certification.

The real benefits, Martin said, are that the process leads to a safer workplace and certification reduces premiums for workers compensation insurance.

ALPCO began pursuing SHARP certification at the end of 2007, Martin said. At that time, employees formed a safety committee that conducted monthly training sessions for other employees.

"We developed a safety committee that was made up of the employees," Martin said. "They were the one that helped ensure that we're doing the things that we've agreed to do in the plant and in the office."

During the SHARP certification period, the OSHA representative inspected all the outlets to make sure they were grounded, checked the safety guarding around the heavy equipment and made sure all employees were wearing the required safety equipment.

"Basically, they want to make sure that we have all the OSHA-required written programs in place and that we've trained our employees," Martin said.

Proof of the value of the certification process can be found in a clear reduction of workplace accidents and lost time, Martin told West Life. In 2006, the company experienced 14 accidents that resulted in 10 days lost work, he said. In 2007, eight accidents caused 10 workdays to be lost.

In 2008, once the SHARP certification process was well underway, the number of accidents went down to three, with eight days of work lost. Thus far in 2009, there have been only two accidents, but no work time was lost.

Martin said achieving the SHARP certification was even more impressive considering that it was done during the severe economic slowdown that affected ALPCO along with the rest of the world.

ALPCO, which has been in business for 50 years, employ 60 people at its Westlake facility on Sperry Road. That's down from a high of 95 in recent years, and the company has had to cut personnel in the past year, company officials said.

Workers at the Westlake factory transform coils of aluminum into the side panels of semi-trailers. Aluminum is also bent, rolled and cut to form other trailer components. The company also manufactures the truck bodies that make up the back of delivery trucks used by UPS and FedEx.

"It would be hard to find a delivery truck whose side walls didn't come out of this factory," said Edward J. Murray, president and CEO of ALPCO.

The privately owned company, which has been headquartered in Westlake since 1982, has five additional sales offices across the country.



Aluminum Line Products employees Bob Beauregard and Mike Jones cut a sheet of aluminum on a CNC shear. (West Life photo by Kevin Kelley)



In business for half a century, Aluminum Line Products transforms rolls of aluminum into side panels for transportation trucks. (West Life photo by Kevin Kelley)



Company employees pose with the SHARP banner they received for successful participation in an OSAH safety certification program. (Photo courtesy of Aluminum Line Products)