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Material Supervisors Dino Gutierrez and Henry Valenzuela stand before a stack of mini-load bins, which hold small parts, during yesterday's appreciation lunch in the Regional Rebuild Center's Central Warehouse. Dieter Hemsing, director of inventory management, praised the role of all his supervisors' in the success of the safety program. Not pictured are Material Supervisors Angel Noriega and Calvin Touchstone.



Photos by Ned Racine

Central Warehouse Crew Celebrates Four-Year Safety Record

- No lost-time injuries in 416,000 hours of work
- Safety's 1st program led to rethinking of safe work practices

By NED RACINE

(May. 23, 2007) With robotic carts buzzing in the background, Tuesday, a celebratory lunch at the Regional Rebuild Center congratulated the Central Warehouse's human workers for achieving a remarkable safety record.

Dieter Hemsing, director of inventory management, and Jim Montoya, manager of Central Warehousing & Distribution, feted their team members in appreciation for reaching four years of work without suffering a single lost-time injury.

The frosting says it all, noting the four year safety



record accomplished by the Central Warehousing & Distribution teams. No injuries resulted from the cutting of the cake.

"The whole idea of having this luncheon is to say 'thank you,' "Hemsing explained. "Thanks for being part of the solution and solving problems."

The four years equal approximately 416,000 hours of work. As a comparison, lost-time injuries in 2002 totaled 600 days, the equivalent of losing two full-time workers.

"One year closer to retirement without having done serious injury to ourselves," Hemsing told approximately 30 members on his first-shift team—the second shift had their lunch later.

Last injury was May 23, 2003

The last lost lost-time injury for the central warehousing operation was May 23, 2003. Hemsing, who has worked 28 years for Metro, has the date memorized. And although he declined to identify the last injured worker, Hemsing made clear that the individual suffers considerable teasing.

The Safety's 1st program "was the precipitating activity that caused people to start rethinking safety here, but it also took a lot of personal commitment from everyone related to it," Hemsing said, citing his supervisors and managers.

Looking at safety issues, Central Warehouse management realized its workforce was growing older. According to Hemsing, the average age of the employees is somewhere in the 40s, with the average seniority being 15 to 16 years.

"These people lift, move material all day long," he said. "They use a lot of their body to do the job. They use their backs, their arms, their legs. We recognized that it wasn't just a matter of having people think about safety, but also do something about it every day. It means personal safety."

For three years Central Warehouse employees have begun their shift with a three-minute stretching exercise. The workers had been suffering mostly soft tissue injuries, related to stressed muscles and ligaments.

"They see the point," Hemsing said. "They see the difference it makes in their day-to-day lives."

Taxpayers see benefits

For taxpayers, the safety record means less money spent on permanent

medical expenses for injured workers. Jim Montoya points out that these savings mean Metro offers more transit services.

"If we don't have the people that are fit to do the job or to show up to work because of injuries," said Montoya, "then we can't do the job of delivering the material and supplies needed to keep the buses running."

Hemsing notes that the safety program reduces overtime costs and keeps the knowledge, experience and imagination of those high-seniority workers in the warehouse.

"Your results have been proven," Ted Montoya, deputy executive officer, Material Management, told the lunch crowd. He sees the emphasis on safety creating a culture shift in Central warehousing operations.

"We want you to come to work every day and have a good time doing it and be safe," Lonnie Mitchell, chief administrative services officer, told the assembled employees.