

International Falls mill earns top Minnesota safety award

Boise Inc.'s paper mill in International Falls has earned the Minnesota Safety Council Award of Honor for exceptional workplace safety performance in 2012.

The Award of Honor – the highest possible in the annual Governor's Safety Awards program – is the mill's fourth in five years. It was presented during the 79th Minnesota Safety & Health Conference in Minneapolis in May.

"I think the award speaks well of us," says hourly safety captain Calvin Fadness. "I think it's saying we're getting some things right here!"

Safety director Jared Ginter says the win was especially gratifying because this year's was a tougher competition. In the past, he says, judging was based on an applicant's incident rate alone. "They didn't include the severity rate or look at your safety program," he says.

Our mill was one of only 32 employers statewide to earn an Award of Honor, with an incident rate at least 91% better than average for its industry and a score of 91 or more on the 100-point safety program evaluation scale. (The mill's incident rate was 0.47, compared with the forest products industry average of 1.46.)

"That mill really is in a rarified place," says Matt Saxe, director of safety and corporate projects. "My belief is that it's because of strong safety leadership."

That "visible safety leadership" is among the things to which Jared attributes the mill's success. He describes it as those "day-to-day behaviors that support an injury-free workplace, by management and by individuals working on the floor." It is behaviors such as going to safety meetings, looking out for each other, investigating incidents, and sharing information – all of which are on the rise.

"Congratulations to International Falls for a great accomplishment. The culmination is that people are safer for it."

– Matt Saxe, director of safety and corporate projects



Safety captains Mel Busch, right, and Ralph Sobkowicz, center, discuss a safety observation for garage employee Jim Carlson as he performs maintenance on a reel cart.

Mill manager Bert Brown agrees. "It's the people in the mill who drive our safety performance through their participation in safety activities and remaining aware of potential safety hazards. It's not about the numbers; it's about keeping all our employees safe."

"We are our brothers' keepers," explains hourly safety captain Melanie Busch. "We want everybody to go home safe every day."