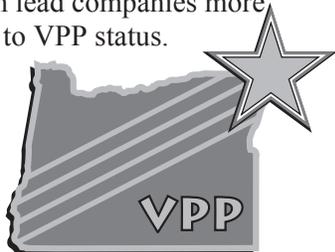


# SHARP: a natural steppingstone to VPP

*In Oregon, VPP is the best of the best, and SHARP is the rest of the best*

By Mark Hurliman, VPP/SHARP Coordinator, OR-OSHA Central

Although SHARP and VPP are separate programs, SHARP participation can lead companies more smoothly to VPP status.



## VPP

*Voluntary Protection Programs* are cooperative compliance programs initiated by OSHA in 1982 to encourage companies to exceed minimum OSHA safety requirements. VPPs emphasize the importance of excellence in occupational-safety-and-health programs. Oregon OSHA adopted VPP in 1996.

The VPP concept recognizes that enforcement of safety regulations alone can never fully achieve the objectives of the *Occupational Safety and Health Act*.

VPP is not “just another program” –it’s a “process” that helps participants accomplish work more safely. VPP serves as a “road-map,” leading participants through four key areas necessary to effective safety-and-health programs:

- Management/leadership/employee involvement
- Worksite analysis
- Hazard prevention and control
- Safety and health training

VPP companies integrate these elements into their safety-and-health management systems. VPP is a partnership in which management, labor, and Oregon OSHA work together with a company that has implemented a strong safety-and-health program:

- Management agrees to operate a program that meets established criteria.

- Employees agree to participate in the program and work with management to ensure a safe and healthful workplace.
- Oregon OSHA provides resources to help improve workplace safety and health on a continuing basis.

## SHARP

Oregon OSHA’s *Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program* is a recognition program developed to provide a road map and an incentive for Oregon employers and employees to work together to find and correct hazards, develop and implement effective safety-and-health programs, continuously improve, and become self-sufficient in managing occupational safety and health.

SHARP is a program of Oregon OSHA’s Consultation and Services Section. The goal of SHARP is to recognize employers that have achieved an exemplary level of occupational-safety-and-health management, to reduce injuries and illnesses, and to provide a means for showing other employers that occupational safety and health can work - for everyone.

There are a couple of things all Oregon employers should know about SHARP: It isn’t SHARP certificates or inspection exemptions that make SHARP special. What makes SHARP special is that Oregon employers can form partnerships with Oregon OSHA consultants to make lasting improvements to their systems for managing safety and health. It’s those

lasting improvements that make the program special. They are why so many SHARP employers tell us that they’re glad they went through the process.

The second thing that makes SHARP special is that it causes employers and employees to accept nothing less than continuous improvement – and once they attain that “mind-set” of constantly striving for continuous improvement, there is little they cannot accomplish.

## The journey

The journey to SHARP status comes about through a process in which Oregon OSHA consultation staff conduct an initial assessment of a company interested in participating, to let the company know how well it is managing safety and health and to identify its strengths and weaknesses. Once that happens, the company can focus its energy where it is most needed. The company develops an action plan and begins working toward its goal. Oregon OSHA consultation staff return, as needed, to provide assistance and guidance. When the company is ready, a consultant conducts a final assessment, and, if the company qualifies, recommends it for SHARP approval. SHARP approval lasts one year. In order to re-qualify, SHARP companies are expected to work toward continuous improvement of their safety-and-health-management systems.

The journey to VPP can be somewhat arduous and lonely if a company has not been through a program or process such as SHARP. Companies that achieve VPP status in the United States are among the best safety-and-health performers in the world. That status is something that companies achieve largely on their own, with little assistance from OSHA. Instead,



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assistance comes from companies that have already achieved VPP status and from members of the Voluntary Protection Program Participants Association.

The journey to VPP status is less arduous for SHARP participants. If a company has achieved SHARP status, it will have a written safety-and-health-management program that is effective and that involves employees. It serves as a foundation for a VPP-quality safety program, and fine-tuning is all that is necessary.

Feedback from participants in Oregon’s SHARP and VPP programs has been positive. It’s rewarding for all parties involved to see safety taken seriously and accidents happening less often.

**Jim Schwindt**, plant manager of Georgia-Pacific’s sawmill and planer in Philomath, said, “The great thing about the Oregon OSHA program is that we were given an opportunity to improve. The SHARP consultants worked with us on training and documentation. Then we came together for a final inspection and they checked everything.

“What has amazed me most is that everyone has been willing to take on extra tasks in order to implement the changes necessary. This is an amazing workforce! Not only did workers do what it took to enter SHARP, they also set records for production and profit.

We feel a lot more comfortable about our VPP application having gone through the Oregon SHARP program,” concluded Schwindt. “It was a good experience.”

**Scott Pedersen**, safety and environmental coordinator at Philomath, said, “SHARP matches consultants with businesses to analyze and correct safety hazards and develop a program for safety recognition. Their (the consultants’) goal is to make you self-sufficient in these areas by helping you develop an action plan to use at your facility.”

**Sandra Owen** of Georgia-Pacific’s sawmill and planer in Coos Bay had this to say about using SHARP to get to VPP: “With the SHARP program as our first step, we are now using the VPP process as a tool to raise our safety standards and to become an in-

dustry leader in safety. These two programs have been the foundation for this process. The safety documentation provides solid, consistent safety programs. But it has been the employee involvement that has become the vital tool. It is rewarding to observe the employees’ interest, participation, and input. The safety program belongs to the employees and the VPP process further enables employees to have ownership and pride in their safety program.”

“VPP is so much about employee involvement,” said **Bill Goodman**, Georgia-Pacific’s Coos Bay plant manager. “And that’s what we’ve worked so hard to improve. SHARP has helped us a great deal in our quest for VPP.

“We are working to strengthen our programs and increase employee involvement as we transition to the national program. It’s great to see all of the employees at the Coos Bay operation thinking more and more about their safety. Our primary goal is to be injury-free, and acceptance into these programs helps us reach that goal.” ■

## STEP up to SHARP

### Oregon employers receive SHARP recognition



Members of the safety committee at **Portland General Electric’s Coal-Fired Power Plant in Boardman**, proudly display the SHARP award from OR-OSHA. Pictured from left are Richard Wicks, Lyle Bliss, Sherri Stogner, Kim Petersen, Dave Knight (committee chairman), Ron Heiple, and Boardman’s safety coordinator, Bob Conner.



Members of **Portland General Electric’s Coyote Springs Plant** safety committee proudly display the SHARP award. Pictured from left are David Sparks (OR-OSHA), Dan Turley, Vice President Steve Quennoz, plant manager Mark Bell, Don Vandeventer, Larry Hull, and CEO and president, Peggy Fowler.