

Bremen Castings: Making Heavy Industry A Safer Place

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Bremen, Ind., is a small town of about 5,500 people roughly 15 minutes south of the South Bend/Elkhart area. And one of its major employers, Bremen Castings Inc. (BCI), has been around long enough, having been established in 1939, to gain a reputation of being one of the area’s best employers. And after more than 70 years of continuous operation, the company’s products in gray and ductile iron machined castings have gained a similar reputation worldwide for being made with the type of quality that has long been associated with American manufacturing.

But back in 2010, BCI’s executives and upper management decided its plant floor safety initiatives needed an overhaul. JB Brown, the company’s current president and fourth-generation employee, is quick to point out that the operations weren’t dangerous before, but strong growth and an increasingly public stature necessitated a more robust system to finding and resolving potential safety hazards. In 2010, BCI hired a safety manager and gave her a “big stick” to make serious results stick.

Because of those changes, the company recently celebrated achieving one million man hours without a lost-time incident, which is defined as an incident that resulted in a fatality, permanent disability or lost time from work. At press time, that equates to more than 700 days. And in a heavy industry, where potential hazards are numerous, reaching one million hours of safe operation is a remarkable

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achievement, and it's one that Brown attributes not only to that "big stick," but also a dramatic shift in company culture, simply by being aware of safety down to the smallest loose cable and scratched knuckle.

He says, "When I was a kid, we used to do a lot of things that probably weren't very safe, and obviously today, things have changed, and the biggest [change] I've seen is that everyone is self-accountable. If someone isn't being safe around them, people are speaking up and telling that person and guiding them. Guys I never thought would have said a word a day in my life are now going around saying, 'That's not safe.' It's pretty cool."

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