



Green Cross for Safety® Awards 2023 Finalist | Innovation

SoCalGas

The mission at SoCalGas is to become the cleanest, safest and most innovative energy infrastructure company in America. As the nation's largest natural gas distribution utility, SoCalGas delivers increasingly clean, safe and reliable energy to over 21 million consumers over a service territory encompassing approximately 24,000 square miles in diverse terrain throughout Central and Southern California, from Visalia to the Mexican border.

Safety is foundational to all SoCalGas does, and it is keenly aware that its approach to safety should be regularly assessed to identify opportunities for improvement. SoCalGas recently underwent a comprehensive third-party assessment of its safety culture utilizing the nuclear industry's normative safety culture framework. This assessment identified key areas to focus its improvement efforts to better advance safety as an organization.

Cultural observations in this assessment included that employees most often perceived safety as personal or occupational safety and that safety and risk management are often perceived as achieved by compliance with rules, regulations and procedures. These observations were further validated through follow-up employee engagements. SoCalGas noted specifically that when employees were asked what safety meant to them, they overwhelmingly answered, "Going home safe at the end of the day to my family."

The company recognized that it needed to assess its approach to safety and gain a better understanding of the organizational and systemic drivers for these perspectives. It also realized its view of safety needed to evolve and expand to include a deeper understanding of its safety capabilities, including the many direct and indirect ways in which both the employees and the organization support the safety of its infrastructure and the communities in which it operates.

SoCalGas lives by three values: Do the Right Thing, Champion People and Shape the Future. Consistent with these values, SoCalGas developed and launched "[Safety Forward](#)," a comprehensive set of actions to strengthen its safety culture, empower enterprise-wide safety leadership and support systemic learning.

**SAFETY
FORWARD**

A SoCalGas Program

Safety Forward offers a unique and innovative approach to cultivating a healthy safety culture, while also supporting improved safety performance. It is influenced by practices and concepts from Human and Organizational Performance, High-Reliability Organizations and Learning Organizations. It is based on the premise that meaningful growth requires both clear senior leadership commitment and involvement and extensive employee engagement and dialogue to inform organization learning and improvement. Safety Forward is rooted in the idea that we are all leaders when it comes to advancing safety and evolving our culture for a better tomorrow.

Safety Forward includes separate initiatives structured to support five interconnected workstreams: Foster a Comprehensive View of Safety, Expand Dynamic Risk Assessment Capabilities, Optimize the Safety Operating Model, Enhance Safety Management System Integration and Mature as a Learning Organization. Each of these workstreams has executive-level sponsorship, with active engagement from SoCalGas's broader executive team through the SoCalGas Executive Safety Council, dedicated project management and change management resources as well as external consultant subject matter expertise. Initiative teams are led by high-performing employees from across the enterprise who are temporarily assigned to the Safety Forward team. This approach is designed to help support the integration of new ideas, foster cross-functional engagement and elevate its people-focused processes. Additionally, when these employees have completed their initiatives, they return to their previous roles with enriched capabilities to further cascade Safety Forward concepts and ideas to their organizations.

Nearly one year into the program, SoCalGas is approaching completion of its first wave of initiatives. This first wave focused on employee dialogue, identifying change and improvement opportunities, and enhancing the organization's foundational understanding of safety and safety culture concepts. Each of these initiatives has led to early learnings and successes on its safety culture journey – thousands of employees reached, dozens of system improvements identified collaboratively, and several new tools and processes developed to improve organizational learning. Examples of some of the Safety Forward impacts thus far include:

- Developing improved systems and processes for dynamic risk assessment (on-the-spot hazard identification) by incorporating firsthand experiences and input of the workforce, encouraging real-time risk identification and partnering with its learning organization to develop training tools.
- Integrating Learning Teams (stakeholder-driven exploration and problem-solving) into its continuous learning and improvement processes by dedicating resources to ongoing identification of topics, learning team event planning and scheduling, and corrective action identification and tracking.
- Revitalizing, expanding and refocusing a Safety Champion network to include champions from every department, nearly doubling the size and reach of the network. This revitalization included developing clear roles and responsibilities, creating an electronic site for information sharing and collaboration, and establishing regularly scheduled meetings for engagement and capacity building.

While SoCalGas is proud of its early accomplishments, its first year of activity revealed several challenges and opportunities to improve Safety Forward. SoCalGas recognizes that safety

culture improvement efforts need to be flexible, and it has pivoted its approach throughout this journey to include implementing the following actions:

1. Changing its communication and engagement strategy to incorporate more expansive dialogue activities emphasizing the value of partnership and conversation (visiting all local safety committees, executive leadership base visits, convening Safety Leadership summits with union leadership, planning for expanded employee dialogue sessions, etc.)
2. Partnering with the Organizational Effectiveness and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion teams to reframe aspects of Safety Forward as a broader cultural effort
3. Recognizing the need for more candid conversations, accountability and reflection to understand the state of its current safety culture
4. Acknowledging that its initial focus on project management and deliverables did not adequately capture the complex social and people aspects of a culture change effort
5. Partnering with other enterprise efforts to integrate messaging, purpose and goals to avoid potential organizational change saturation
6. Modifying initiative plans to enable more collaborative, grassroots and systemic change

Through Safety Forward, SoCalGas is committed to taking significant actions to evaluate and evolve its approach to safety. It recognizes this is necessarily an ongoing process of learning, change and improvement, but it expects to complete its currently planned activities by early 2025. At this point, it will begin planning for its next comprehensive safety culture assessment.

Ultimately, its goal is to institutionalize the values and capabilities it is developing through Safety Forward – pervasive safety leadership, a comprehensive understanding and approach to safety, heightened psychological safety, collaborative efforts to learn and improve, and maintaining open conversations to grow and mature. As SoCalGas continues to advance its culture change efforts, it looks forward to further sharing its story with its peers – lessons learned, successes and struggles. It is excited to continue this effort to transform how it thinks about, talks about and approaches safety at SoCalGas!