Increasing global competition, growing public sentiment and the desire to achieve sustainability in operations have led many companies to seek ways in which to augment their competitive advantage through improved safety. To achieve sustainable improvement, it is vital that management drive change by visibly embracing safety as a core value. By espousing such an ethos, the Maintenance Directorate of London Underground was able to reduce its lost time injury rate by 66% over a five year period and ultimately earn the 2009 DuPont Safety Award for visible management commitment.

The Maintenance Directorate of London Underground is responsible for the maintenance and repair of two-thirds of the London Underground network, including trains, stations, signalling, track, tunnels, bridges, lifts, escalators and other related infrastructure. With over 4,000 employees, the Maintenance Directorate ensures that all planned maintenance on the transport system’s 11 lines, 270 stations and over 500 trains is completed on schedule, within budget and according to corporate safety standards. Workers are routinely exposed to safety hazards - working at heights, lifting heavy components in confined spaces, working in close proximity to moving vehicles and handling high-voltage electrified materials – thus requiring due diligence and a strong commitment to working safely.
The Maintenance Directorate has long considered safety to be a top priority and a core corporate value. However, according to Safety, Quality and Environment Manager Simon Peacock, “we wanted to move away from remote analysis and reporting into an environment where managers could measure and manage safety themselves, create ownership locally, making safety something that was not done to them, but by them.” With the help of DuPont, the Maintenance Directorate developed a variety of management-led initiatives to catalyse improvement in safety.

Company executives recognized that visible safety leadership would serve as both a method of demonstrating commitment, but also a platform upon which managers could engage with employees. In light of this, the “Go, Look, See” process was developed. In the event of a lost time injury, senior managers personally visit the site of the incident, talk to people involved, review actions taken and formulate future preventive strategies. Once the process is completed, the lessons learned from the incident are shared with relevant staff - briefings are held, internal safety bulletins are posted and a discussion ensures within the context of the internal communications magazine entitled “Maintenance Matters.”

The “Go, Look, See” process itself is part of a wider effort to improve accountability and cultivate ownership of safety performance among managers. Managers have become the stewards of safety performance, assuming responsibility for incident investigation, a process previously carried out by health and safety representatives. To develop pertinent skills, over 100 managers completed a specialized training module on incident investigation. Ample opportunities to apply these skills were presented due to the expansion of the investigation mandate to include all incidents - not simply those involving lost time injuries. The enlarged mandate provides managers with additional opportunities to engage employees on the topic of safety, while demonstrating management commitment to the prevention of all injuries and incidents without regard to severity.

Pursuant to this goal of demonstrating management commitment to improved safety, the Maintenance Directorate also established several new communication channels through which information pertaining to safety is transmitted. The “Incident Reporting Line,” a call-centre based logging system, allows staff at the incident site to report incidents to trained safety personnel. Upon receipt of any report, text messages relaying vital information are sent to appropriate managers and employee representatives, allowing for immediate response. Additionally, company executives conduct daily conference calls to discuss the safety performance of the previous day, with special emphasis on any incidents or injuries that may have occurred. “The daily conference call is part of how we now do business” according to Mr. Peacock.

To further emphasize the importance of safety within the company, senior leadership established the annual Health, Safety and Environment Conference. Contractors, suppliers, staff and managers convene to discuss relevant safety issues and recognize exemplary performance among specific individuals or teams. “Generally demand outstrips the capacity of the venue,” said Mr. Peacock. Live debates, expert presentations, video footage of the “Go, Look, See” process and an exhibition highlighting best practices serve to incite an active discourse on safety.

“We are on a journey of continuous improvement to ensure that everyone understands their role in improving safety performance”
Simon Peacock – Safety, Quality and Environment Manager
Though each initiative has proven successful on its own merits, the net effect of the programmes has been a reinforcement of the corporate safety culture. By introducing process-based methodologies that improve managerial accountability and facilitate engagement with workers, a strong sense of individual and collective ownership of safety has developed among employees at all levels. “We are on a journey of continuous improvement to ensure that everyone understands their role in improving safety performance” according to Mr. Peacock. By developing a comprehensive safety culture, the Maintenance Directorate was able to reduce the number of lost time injuries from 450 per annum to 150 per annum over the last five years, a 66% reduction.

In 2009, the Maintenance Directorate was recognized for the extraordinary commitment of its managers to safety, earning the prestigious DuPont Safety Award for visible management commitment. In accepting the award, Phil Hufton, Chief Maintenance Officer stated, “we will never become complacent about safety, and will continue to build on this achievement to make even greater progress on our journey to be a world class Tube for a world class city.”

London Underground’s Maintenance Directorate is responsible for the upkeep and repair of two-thirds of the London Underground network. This includes trains, stations, signalling, track, tunnels, bridges and structures, lifts and escalators and other related infrastructure. Our key priorities are the safe performance of assets and managing day-to-day incidents across the railway. We are also committed to delivering 100 per cent of planned maintenance - on time, within budget and to safety standards whilst ensuring operational performance is delivered with clear and visual controls in place.