What is Safety Culture?

There are various definitions of safety culture. Most focus on the idea that where a positive safety culture exists, individuals and organizations emphasize safety over competing goals such as production or costs, recognizing that the activities in which they participate could have serious consequences if they are not conducted with a safety-first focus.

The NRC has a policy statement concerning safety culture, and we, as NRC licensees, are obligated to strive to create and maintain that culture in our workplace involving radioactive materials. The policy was developed over three years and was created after the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Weaknesses in the safety culture have shown to be the underlying cause or to have increased the severity of problems that have occurred.

The NRC defines nuclear safety culture as:

“Nuclear safety culture is the core values and behaviors resulting from a collective commitment by leaders and individuals to emphasize safety over competing goals to ensure protection of people and the environment.”

There are certain traits that are found to be present in a positive safety culture, and they are as follows:

Leadership Safety Values and Actions- The leaders show their commitment to safety in their actions and decisions.

Problem Identification and Resolution- Possible safety issues are quickly identified assessed and corrected.

Personal Accountability- All individuals take responsibility for safety in their environment.
**Work Processes** – Planning and conducting work involving radioactive materials is done so with safety in mind.

**Continuous Learning** – Chances to learn more about making safety a priority are sought out and implemented.

**Safe Environment for Raising Concerns** – The safety-focused work environment is kept where individuals feel free to voice safety concerns without fear of discrimination, retaliation, harassment, or intimidation.

**Effective Safety Communication** – Communications focus is safety.

**Respectful Work Environment** – Trust and respect are shown throughout the organization.

**Questioning Attitude** – Personnel are always keeping an eye out for conditions or activities that might result in error or inappropriate actions.

On our open campus, we all need to be mindful of the security of radioactive materials. Be aware of your surroundings, and don’t be afraid to politely ask for the identity of a stranger that enters your area. Never give up possession of a radioactive material to someone that you don’t know without confirming that they are authorized to have the material. Keep doors locked to restrict access.

Always look for ways to make a process safer. If we can use shielding that won’t impede the process, if we can shorten exposure times, if we can increase the distance from the source to individuals, if we don’t take security short-cuts.....all of these can create a more positive safety culture.

Listen to those around you for creative ideas to improve procedures and take the time to plan and implement items that will increase the safety of our campus.