Green Belt Project tracks safety problems on campus, leads to improvements
By Gwen O’Brien, Internal Communications

Words tell a story, right? Not always. Depending on what you are trying to convey, data can be more meaningful than words.

“You could say, ‘I feel this or that is the case,’ but is it true? Let the data tell the story,” says Eric Kloss, director of Risk Management and Safety (RMS).

Over the summer, the department launched an incident reporting and data collection system that records injuries, property damage, and auto accidents that happen on campus or to Notre Dame property and tracks each incident by type, where it occurred, and what department may be affected. The tool assists in incident reporting, tracks information about each event, and reveals trends so RMS staff can work with departments to fix problems.

“From a University standpoint, we now have one centralized place where all this data resides so we can see holistically what’s going on,” says Kloss.

Eric Doland, assistant director of compliance assurance, calls the system “awesome.”

“It helps us navigate the areas to focus on,” says Doland. “If there’s a department that has a higher injury rate, with this tool we can identify root causes and then look globally at other departments and start gathering trends on those causes. Are there commonalities? Do we need training in more than one department?”

The tool also makes it easy to update senior leadership on safety progress.

“I can report information such as the numbers of incidents in a given time period and how we are doing on closing actions (resolving safety issues) identified from the incidents. This is a more proactive approach than in the past,” Kloss explains.

The enhanced system is the outcome of a Green Belt project.

Every year, the Office of Continuous Improvement teams up with departments for Green Belt training to improve department processes. In this case, RMS sought the assistance of Continuous Improvement to turn incident numbers into usable data that drives change to keep people safe.

“It’s ultimately about having people go home the same way they arrived at Notre Dame on a given day. We’re trying to make sure people remain safe,” says Kloss.

Emily Hildebrandt, formerly the data coordinator for RMS, and Abe Chaaban, an application development professional in the Office of Information Technologies (OIT), were co-leads on the Green Belt project, working with Continuous Improvement coach Angela Knobloch.

“The guidance that the Office of Continuous Improvement provided was phenomenal,” says Hildebrandt, adding that the Green Belt project took a full year. “There is a high level of thought and intentionality to the process. It’s a major commitment that is absolutely worth it.”

Before the Green Belt process began, two years ago RMS transitioned from a spreadsheet system of gathering information to a data management tool called OnBase, created by the OIT. As part of the Green Belt, the data on OnBase was linked to a dashboard in Tableau, a data visualization and analysis tool supported by OIT.

The “before” and “after” transformation is dramatic.
“Through the dashboard in Tableau, we can see the injury trends,” explains Doland. “We discovered that we have a lot of slips, trips and falls, whether it be in the winter months—which is a big contributor—or otherwise. We also have what we call repetitive motion, manual labor injuries, like reaching, bending, pulling, lifting. From that we see what things we need to work on to help reduce those numbers, like an ergonomics program.”

So far, RMS in partnership with the Wellness Center has conducted preventative training programs for employees in various departments like Campus Dining, St. Michael’s Laundry, and Building Services.

“We offer training for things like entry into confined spaces, hot work (e.g., welding), and fall protection. The training raises the awareness of safety among employees, so that’s another positive outcome,” says Kloss.

Another outcome is an Operational Safety Advisory Committee, which is developing a strategy on how to tackle safety across campus. “We’re looking at how to make the biggest impact on the safety of people across campus,” notes Kloss.

To see the data, Notre Dame employees can log into tableau.nd.edu with a net ID and click on the Risk Management and Safety Injury Metrics folder. Then click on the workbooks to see the “Injury and Illness” and the “12-month Rolling Incident Rates” dashboards.

“This is our 12-month rolling average for our different divisions,” says Hildebrandt pointing out one Tableau graph. “If we look at the Executive Vice President’s 10 divisions, the incident rate in 2013 was 10.77 and it was down to a 5.11 at the end of June this year.”

What that means, loosely, is that 10.7 of every 100 full-time employees were being injured on the job in 2013. Five years later, the number of injuries is half that. (Several of the EVP divisions include work that requires physical labor, for example in Building Services, Landscape Services, St. Michael’s Laundry and Campus Dining.)

“There is a specific formula produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) that we use to calculate these incident rates,” Hildebrandt explains. “Essentially, we have made great progress in reducing the number of employees that are injured.”

That progress across the University is encouraging to RMS.

“I think we’re educating our stakeholders across campus to a level that they didn’t have in the past, which then opens the eyes,” Doland says. “They’ve become more aware of things to measure, and we can use it to move the needle, to direct what we need to help drive the program. It’s been really cool to see that evolution of the metrics.”

Anyone can report a safety incident or hazard. Go to riskmanagement.nd.edu and, on the left, click on “Incident Reporting and Management.” The form that pops up is easy to fill out, and the information is entered directly into the sophisticated system.

The Green Belt Project also impacted Hildebrandt’s professional development. “This has been a powerful learning opportunity,” she says.

Emily was recently promoted to Advisor to the Vice President for Strategic Planning and Institutional Research.

Guidelines and criteria for applying to take part in Green Belt training can be found at ntrda.me/greenbelt.