

The MORTORQ Guide to Starting a Safety Program

Hi! My name is Ella Cox and I am the 2019-2020 safety captain for MORTORQ, FRC Team 1515. I started my safety journey at the 2019 LA Regional, and the event was a huge learning opportunity for me. The safety captain at the time, Alex McDermott, was unable to attend and I was given the opportunity to present our safety program. I was inspired by Alex to become safety captain and remains a valuable mentor and resource to me. As not every team has their own Alex, this is the team 1515 guide to safety for all teams, rookie to veteran, because it's always a perfect time to improve your program!

Why Safety?

On many teams, safety feels like a joke, and safety captains just make sure that the pit is clean. However, being a safety captain can be super rewarding. Safety is an area that most teams can significantly improve, and it has nothing to do with how good you are at building robots. This means that even if you are a rookie team, you can still bring home awards for your safety program, or at the very least, show adult leadership and sponsors how committed your team is to creating a successful workspace, and getting rewarded for your professional programs.

Writing a Safety Manual

The best place to start your program is to begin writing a safety manual. This manual will outline all of your safety procedures, and will hold original copies of any checklists you use. It's a great way to show off your safety program, and it makes sure that future safety captains will be able to pick up where you left off. To get going, first read the current FIRST Safety Manual. This will explain the bare minimum that you must do to have a successful safety program. You can also use it as inspiration for your own safety manual. Then, start writing! I started my manual with a mission statement and founding principles of the program, but you can make your program whatever you want! Some items you may want to include in your manual are: tool training procedures and logs, emergency events and evacuation, safe woodshop behaviors, cleanup checklists, or anything else your team does to promote safety.

Other Safety Binders

In addition to a safety manual, you will need a place to store your MSDS, or material safety data sheets. These are necessary for all chemicals or potentially hazardous substances in the shop because you may need them for first aid, storage, or fire-fighting info. Make sure that the binder is accessible and easy to grab in case you need to evacuate and show the MSDS to fire fighters.

I also recommend keeping a logbook, or a place where you will store all completed checklists and tool training logs. A logbook is another way to show off your safety program, but more importantly, it allows you to keep your information in one place so that it can be easily analyzed.

More Suggestions -Update your PPE! Make sure that you have enough eye protection, masks, gloves, face shields, and hearing protection to keep your team safe. Often, you can get the school to pay for these items as they have an obligation to keep students safe.

- Start a list of ideas while still at competition. Draw inspiration from other teams and think of solutions to problems you see.
- Make a battery spill kit. Battery spill kits are something that many teams forget about, but they are very necessary. Although batteries don't often spruill, if they do, you must be prepared. Build a basic kit by following instructions from the FIRST safety manual.
- SIGNS SIGNS SIGNS! Signs are a super easy way to keep everyone safe. Make sure that you have proper signage for all fire equipment, first aid, battery spill kits, PPE, and possible hazards. You can print paper signs for almost anything from many websites. My go to is: www.mysafetysign.com. Find a PDF or make a custom sign to fit your needs!
 - Stay clean! Clean work spaces are the safest ones. Not only will you eliminate hazards, but you will also be able to work more efficiently as tools and supplies will be in the right place. We started off the year dedicating half an hour to cleaning at the end of a work session, and gradually shortened the time as we got faster. While this can sound like a lot of time, we found that it makes a huge difference.
 - Don't stop. Even when you feel like you're done, there is always something else you can add to your program. When you feel like you are done with your program in the shop, start safety outreach! Add to the team website or start a YouTube channel! The possibilities are endless!

Contact Me

You can reach me at:

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I would love to talk to you about safety, and I look forward to collaborating and improving both our teams!

Good luck on your safety endeavors!

