



REPORTER PHOTO BY SARAH LANG

Lori Torres, commissioner of the Indiana Department of Labor, presents the VPP award plaque to Plant Manager Dave Arnold Wednesday morning in front of Hendrickson Trailer Suspension Systems in the Lebanon Business Park, while Hendrickson's safety team applauds in the background.

Hendrickson wins elusive honor

BY SARAH LANG
The Lebanon Reporter

LEBANON — One business is now the first in Lebanon to be awarded with the Occupational Health and Safety Administration's highest award — OSHA's Voluntary Protection Program.

Hendrickson Trailer Suspension Systems, in the Lebanon Business Park, was honored as a VPP Star work site by Lori Torres, commissioner of the Indiana Department of Labor, Wednesday morning at a company celebration. Production was even shut down for the celebration.

"I know that's a big deal, so it's a testament to this distinction and this honor," Torres said to a crowd of Hendrickson employees, all wearing bright orange T-shirts with "First in Lebanon with VPP" printed on the back. "You have an amazing safety record considering what you do."

Torres explained that of the 140,000 employers in Indiana, only 56 have qual-

fied for VPP status — just four out of every 10,000 businesses.

"So we really are talking about a very select group," Torres said.

"You really have done a tremendous job and should be proud," added Mike Gaskill, director of VPP. "It's hard to realize just how dangerous industrial work can be. This is not a paper clip manufacturing company."

There are 19 elements to qualify for VPP: management commitment and planning, accountability, disciplinary program, injury rates, employee participation, self-inspections, employee hazard reporting system, accident and incident investigations, process reviews, safety and health training, preventive maintenance, emergency

programs and drills, health program, personal protective equipment, safety and health staff involved with changes, contractor safety, medical program, resources, and an annual evaluation. The average VPP work site sees work-day incidence rates more than 50 percent lower than the average of its industry.

"We've been working on this for the past five years. It was a long road to get here, but we got here."

DARRELL HART
From Hendrickson

here, but we got here."

During those five years, staff and associates worked to develop programs and procedures that steadily reduced the number and severity of injuries occurring at the plant, Hart said. Incidents involving injuries were reduced by more than 50 percent, and programs were developed that correct-

ed or removed hazards affecting employees by 80 percent.

"It opened our eyes to realize we could do things in a safer way," said Justin Buckles, assembler and trainer at Hendrickson. "We also had people we could bring a safety issue to and get it corrected. Hazards are fixed much faster now."

Almost all of Hendrickson's United States' plants are now VPP sites, said Perry Bahr, vice president and general manager — in Canton, Ohio; Mitchell, S.D.; Clarksville, Tenn.; and now Lebanon. The only one that isn't is in Somerset, Ky, but it's too new to qualify.

"The worst day of my life was when I visited a girl in Clarksville that lost an arm," Bahr said. "And I never wanted to do that again."

Mayor Huck Lewis thanked Hendrickson for being a "valuable company" in Lebanon for many years.

Hendrickson will hold a 15th anniversary celebration and open house from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday with hot dogs, hamburgers, pony rides and dunk tanks.