

A Mother's Influence

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When my mother was a child in the coalfields of West Virginia, she experienced firsthand the need for good safety at work. When she was a small child in school and would hear the mine alarm whistle blow, she would panic. All the kids would run to the mine to see if their dad came out. She said she would stand there with her little fingers crossed and pray that her daddy came out of the mine. He knew she would be there, so when he came out he would wave to her. She said that many times she would see some other child start to cry because their dad didn't come out. She also told me that over the mine entrance, in the concrete, it said "Safety First," and she thought to herself, "I wish they really actually practiced that instead of just saying it".

Anyways, my mother grew up and moved away from the mining town, and her father got a job in a safer place. However shortly after this move, he died from black lung that resulted from his years in the mine. There were no good respiratory programs in place then, and many men from that era died in the same way. The town my mother grew up in was way back in the hills of WV where it didn't matter much and no one really seemed to care. This town was called Montcoal, WV, does this name ring a bell to you? On April 5, 2010, 29 miners died in an explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine in Montcoal, WV.

That mine claimed that they were one of the safest around that area and had an outstanding safety focus. It goes to prove that just because you have programs doesn't make you safe; you must use them all of the time.

Before my mother died, she saw me make the switch into the HSE field and was so proud because she was certain I would make a difference and never compromise what was right. She told me that no matter where I go to work there may be a little girl with her fingers crossed hoping her dad or mom comes home safely. She also told me that if you are passionate about something, others can feel it and are more inclined to listen and follow. Creating a caring environment goes as far in the work place as any rule you will ever have. I am not sure how to teach this, but it is real and has a direct influence towards the desired outcome.