

Pathways to Organizational Safety Success



Opici Family Distributing: *Employee Safety a Top Priority for Operational Success*

Opici Family Distributing, which was founded in 1934 in Paterson, New Jersey, represents hundreds of producers of wine and spirits throughout the world. What began as a small family business almost a century ago has become a major distributor with 11 wholesale facilities in seven locations – New Jersey (three sites), Florida (two sites), the Mid-Atlantic (including Delaware, Maryland and Washington, D.C.), New York and Connecticut.

The company, which was named to the list of *Wines & Vines Top 10 Wine Distributors in the United States* in September of 2019, continues to expand into new markets with a focus on the Mid-Atlantic region, while growing their distribution and bringing new products to the forefront. But regardless of the changes that occur in the beverage industry, Opici celebrates relationships first and foremost—not only relationships fostered with their customers, but with their employees as well.

As a fourth-generation company, Opici considers their employees to be family—a key to their success; and as such, has placed a focus on their safety and well-being. Their safety program is a visible component of this belief. With 100% commitment from ownership, their team includes a committed safety & loss prevention manager and the operational oversight of an EVP of Operations,

along with location leaders and supervisors who engage their teams. “I think what they have done is empowered their teams to do what needs to be done to reduce accidents,” says Vladimir D’Argenio, Esq., Strategic Risk Control Consultant for PMA Companies. “They have a problem-solving group of employees who have a voice and a heart,” he says. “You give them information and they take it to their teammates, and it has worked really well.”

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Opici Family Distributing (continued)

PMA's risk control approach for Opici mirrors the process of that for other clients—a detailed risk assessment, loss analysis, service planning, consulting services and the ongoing monitoring of results. This strategy was coordinated with Opici by Insurance Broker/Consultant Devin E. Blazier of Alliant Insurance Services, Inc., when they first became a client of PMA back in 2015. Positive results were seen from 2015 to 2017, with an overall 32% reduction in their total frequency rate and a 39% reduction in their slip/fall frequency rate.

However, in 2018, Opici found themselves in a bidding process in the workers' compensation marketplace and moved away from PMA. What proceeded was unexpected challenges. "We were with a different broker at that time, and our new carrier changed their risk coordinator three times in a twelve-month period," says Ron Gallo, Executive Vice President of Operations and Finance for Opici. "Additionally, there was so much confusion about our service plan and training," he says.

The company soon returned to their original Broker/Consultant Blazier at broker Alliant; and requested to work with PMA again in search of the former partnership. "It was one of the best times we had in terms of the cohesiveness of all of our safety programs, trainings and ongoing initiatives; we made a lot of progress during that time," says Gallo.

By January of 2020, Opici was again working with Broker/Consultant Blazier of Alliant and PMA Risk Control Consultant D'Argenio. During monthly meetings, which have been held virtually since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic occurred in March 2020, telematics data (via a fleet monitoring system that monitors fleet and

driver behavior) is reviewed and assists location managers in addressing driver behavior trends such as speeding or hard braking. "The driver telematics detect incidents," says Tamika Strickland, Opici's Safety & Loss Prevention Manager. "We have cameras on our trucks, inside and outside of the vehicles. It was a huge investment, but it's a great added component to our business." Consultant Blazier also echoes this sentiment. "Without a doubt, the addition of telematics, dash cams and motor observation reporting are risk management game changers resulting in a huge return on investment."

During the meeting, managers also share information about workers' compensation claims and discuss root causes and corrective actions.



Recent trainings on safety leadership and strain prevention have been held with supervisors, who in turn then train, coach and motivate employees on safe lifting techniques. "Alliant and PMA make my job a lot easier just by making sure we're all on the same page," says Strickland. "This includes training, driver telematics, OSHA simulated inspections and implementing uniform policies and procedures throughout the company," she says. "We are a true team."

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