



News Release

Contact

ERMC Public Affairs Office
DSN 371-3317/3049
Tel. 06221-17-3317/3049
ermc-pao@amedd.army.mil
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Bavaria clinic first to achieve Star Status in Army MEDCOM

By Douglas DeMaio, Bavaria Medical Department Activity Public Affairs

VILSECK, Germany – The Illesheim Army Health Clinic is the first organization within the U.S. Army Medical Command and one of few units within the Department of Defense to earn the impressive Star Status, an elite Occupational Safety and Health Administration standard.

Upon completion of the final phase of a rigorous assessments June 21, the Illesheim Clinic attained the Department of Defense's Voluntary Protection Programs Star Status for exemplary occupational health and safety standards and processes.

"We have become an Army star site for VPP," said Maj. Vincent Myers, who was commander of the clinics from August 2010 to June 28. "It has been a long road, but our staff has done an incredible job to get us where we are today."

VPP is a DOD program designed to reduce accidents by building a safety-conscious culture in the workplace through the implementation of safety practices and procedures. Achieving Star Status requires three stages of assessments focused on management leadership and employee involvement, worksite analysis, hazard prevention and control, and safety and health training.

Thirty-six months is the standard duration to complete the three-stage assessment to achieve a Star Status, said Doris Scheuring, a safety specialist for Bavaria Medical Department Activity. Illesheim Health Clinic achieved the Star Status in 17 months.

"I've had the opportunity to be on a lot of good teams in my Army career and what makes up a good team is a lot of good leaders and some great leaders," Myers said. "What makes up a great team is a lot of great leaders, and this organization, the Illesheim Health Clinic, is full of great leaders and that is why this has been such a success. "

Illesheim started its VPP assessment in January 2011, said Thomas Zirkelbach, the safety manager for BMEDDAC. For the unit to move to the final inspection stage, deficiencies found in stages one and two of the inspections must be corrected and documented.

"Stage one they come and look at you as a whole," Myers said. "Stage two they take a much more detailed look into your processes. Stage three is really focused on the staff and how they interact and put it all together."

In stage three, all members of the staff are interviewed, Myers said.

“It is an assessment to ensure the staff understands and knows safety,” he said. “To see the Soldiers and civilians of the Illesheim Health Clinic achieve this status as the first in MEDCOM to be an OSHA star site is truly an honor to me.”

By achieving Star Status, Illesheim Health Clinic becomes a mentoring unit to assist other clinics in achieving VPP certifications, Myers said. Since 2010, Army Medicine has been working to implement VPP certification across its facilities.

“We are now really the model for the MEDCOM,” Myers said. “This is a program that the MEDCOM is adopting across the board next year. We have already reached out to some of our fellow clinics to start talking OSHA VPP, and what it is about.”

The path to achieve the Star Status was filled with many obstacles including clinic renovations that could easily have complicated or distracted the staff from earning the safety status, he said.

“The renovation provided us with a lot of challenges because we constantly had work going on,” Myers said.

Through more than half of their certification assessment, renovations were made to Illesheim’s clinic. The staff and patients were in temporary facilities. Work was constantly taking place in the area next to staff and patients and most of the construction workers did not speak English, so there was potential for a mishap due to miscommunication.

“The language barrier and the ‘lost-in-translation’ piece puts you at a higher risk for a safety related incident,” Myers said. “I think the fact that our staff focused on safety during this time more so than previously has really been a huge opportunity for us to grow as an organization. Over that entire year renovation period, we had zero safety incidents.”

Illesheim is 50 percent below the national average for Total Case Incident Rate category and 75 percent below the national average for Days Away, Restricted, and Time Away category.

“The bottom line is that for three and a half consecutive years they had just one accident,” Scheuring said.

“By establishing this culture of safety, now sustainment really is the easy part,” Myers said. “The critical thing is in sustainment, I feel that by changing the culture it becomes as normal as putting on your pants. Now they have that culture of safety and rather than stepping over it, they pick it up. Rather than walking by, they take ownership and that is important.”

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Captions

20120627-A-DE9049-001 - Maria Salazar, who provides janitorial services for the Illesheim Health Clinic, mops between two warning signs at the clinic June 27. Instituting policies, processes and procedure that ensure safety within the facility are initiatives that lead to the clinic achieving the Department of Defense’s Voluntary Protection Programs Star Status. Being a member of the staff, Salazar was interviewed during the final VPP stage, which measures the staffs’ understanding of safety knowledge.

20120628-A-DE9049-003 – Staff members of the Illesheim Health Clinic gather in the hallway of the clinic for a morning huddle. The team has a daily morning huddle where members of the team can raise issues about their work environment.