NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – Throwing a dart in the workplace isn’t safe, but DART helps managers identify safety issues and prevent mishaps and workplace accidents.

Paying attention to DART has helped Commander, Fleet Readiness Centers (COMFRC) become safer as Total Case Incident Rate (TCIR) and Days Away, Restricted, Transfer (DART) rates are at an all-time low and a pace that is up to 20 percent safer than Fiscal Year (FY) 2017.

“The COMFRC enterprise has attained a TCIR rate of 2.12 and DART rate of 1.28 through the first three quarters of FY 2018,” said Mitch Bauman, COMFRC director for Safety, Quality and Regulatory Compliance. “This represents the top milestone in safety metrics ever in COMFRC history. As a comparison, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports the injury rate for aerospace depot maintenance operations is a TCIR rate of 3.4 and DART rate of 2.1.”

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, TCIR is the generally accepted measurement of the rate of workplace injuries and illnesses within a given population in the United States.
COMFRC Safety rate continues to improve

and tracked by OSHA. TCIR is a calculation based on the number of mandatory reported Occupational Safety and Health Administration, or OSHA, recordable injuries and illnesses that occur each year at any company or workplace.

DART is another safety metric reported to OSHA. It helps employers determine how many workplace injuries and illnesses required employees to miss work, perform restricted work activities or transfer to another job within a calendar year.

Bauman attributes the reduction in the COMFRC TCIR and DART rates to increased awareness throughout the command for safety as a result of Safety Management System (SMS) implementation. In 2014, COMFRC established a SMS program for all commands to build a mindful safety culture. Through the use of monthly area safety audits and leadership engagement, hazards are identified and mitigation implemented.

“All intermediate maintenance sites and depots are implementing the SMS across the enterprise with an expected completion date of October 1, 2020,” he said. “This has occurred in part due to the active participation of the Leadership commitment and employee engagement in the SMS Process. While production is important, safety, quality, schedule and cost are the priorities, in that order.”

“This direction along with the SMS and a workforce safety awareness is continuing the decline in the injury rate,” he said. “It is making a difference in identifying hazards and keeping injuries and damage to property at a minimum.”

Fewer accidents result in fewer accident compensation claims. In FY 2014, accident compensation payments cost $10.5 million in FY 2014. So far through the 3rd quarter of FY 2018, payments were $6.5 million across COMFRC.

FRC East looked beyond the numbers and did a trend analysis of injury data and made some changes that have significantly reduced workplace injuries.

“We discovered that many injuries were falling in two major categories, that being head injuries from bumping into aircraft leading edges and panels and cutting hands from handling of various materials,” said Amy Morgan, FRC East Safety, Quality & Regulatory Compliance department head.

“We researched preventive measures and bump caps – protective head gear designed to protect the wearer from minor head bumps and lacerations -- had been successful at other aviation facilities,” she said. “We implemented a mandatory policy that bump caps are to be worn when within five feet of any aircraft. I am happy to report we have reduced our head injury rate to nearly zero.”

A similar policy required protective glove usage for all aircraft line and material handling work, with a significant drop in hand injuries due to cuts, said Morgan.
COMFRC Safety rate continues to improve

FRC East also requires a 10-hour OSHA training course for supervisors.

“We have received really good feedback from supervisors that have taken the class that it was truly an eye opener to the hazards in the facility that they were unaware of and now are,” Morgan said. “We are safer as a Command for having instituted this requirement.”

FRC East has a partnership agreement with the Raleigh, North Carolina, OSHA office; the International Association of Machinist and Aerospace Workers; American Federation of Government Employees and the National Association of Aeronautical Examiners to “focus on the reducing and preventing worker exposure to prevalent aircraft maintenance hazards and heat illnesses, as well as hazards unique to the Navy aircraft maintenance environment.”

FRC Southeast and FRC Southwest are making similar strides in improving workplace safety as well.

FRC Southeast in Jacksonville, Florida, earned the Chief of Naval Operations Activity Excellence in Shore Safety Award for 2016 in the large industrial category. The award recognizes efficiency of operations through safety, using an aggressive safety management system as well as new ideas in mishap prevention.

“This award wouldn’t have been possible without everyone’s efforts,” said Peter Gallant, who was the FRC Southeast safety director during the award period. “This command-led effort creates a culture built around the two great safety pillars: senior leadership involvement and worker participation.”

FRC Southwest’s efforts in enhancing safety began with certification and conformance to Occupational Health and Safety Management System 18001:2007, an international standard which provides a framework to identify, control and decrease the risks associated with health and safety within the workplace, is overseen by the command’s SMS. Conforming to the international safety standard is a must in striving to improve in the processes of protecting the artisan and government property.

As the demand for more readiness from workforce increases from the FLEET, the COMFRC enterprise is well prepared to meet the demand safely, Bauman said.