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“Your Safety is our business”



Accountability: Ensuring learners use their safety skills

By Gavin Bruwer

Yes, employers are required to provide certain types of safety training to employees, but how effective are these newly acquired safety skills utilized, or do we simply train in order to follow the letter of the law?

When one reviews policies and commitment statements the competency aspect is often generically addressed as follows: “People will need to be trained to perform their jobs safely prior to being assigned these tasks, and no one will be permitted to perform a job prior to demonstrating that he or she understands and can perform the job safely” Unfortunately this commitment often ends with the training certificate.

Training is the first step to competency. True competency comes through active participation where learned skills are honed to a point where competency is a reflection of culture. With increased competency we have an elevated performance expectation, which should be a condition of training and skills development. This is however not a given unless we maximize these newly acquired skills.

Here are a few tips to assist in maximizing the use of these safety skills:

- **Get workers involved.** Make sure they understand which training is mandatory and how training can help them protect themselves and do their jobs more efficiently. Encourage participation in investigations, toolbox talks and site inspections.
- **Consider interactive training.** This will engage workers in the learning process and help reinforce the training message.
- **Hold employees accountable.** Follow up after training to make sure employees are using the techniques and implementing the procedures they have learnt. Explain the consequences for not following the required procedures. Address weak performance against the newly acquired skills.
- **Look for measurable results.** If you can identify tangible results (e.g., lower incident rate, cleaner working areas), management will be more willing to invest in additional training. Improved competency through training that delivers no results is a waste of money that could have been used elsewhere in your program.

Finding the Path to Safety – Using a compass and not a map

By Gavin Bruwer

“Is your safety compass calibrated, or have you got lost?”

As leaders we often ask what the answer is to our safety issues - Is it unrecognized hazards, compliance failure or complacent and injured workers? It's as if we want a very specific road map to lead us to that magical workplace where nobody gets hurt. Rather than looking for the perfect predefined path, we should set the course for safety in our organization and stick with it. The reality is, safety is more like a compass than a map.

We can set an OHSAS 18001 path, but unless we have a safety compass to guide us and give direction we will continue suffering delays and setbacks due to poor hazard identification, inappropriate behavior and commitment. When we follow the safety compass for the course we have set, we will arrive at our desired destination.

Let's now take a look at the four primary points on the safety compass, which will afford the safest, most direct route to our destination:



NORTH - Nobody gets hurt

Set a course for zero injuries daily and stop using statistical variation as an indicator of where you are on this journey. A target of zero requires a sustained ability and belief to achieve zero, which can only be achieved if we point our compass north every day and with every task.

WEST - Who is responsible for safety?

This is an excellent question to ask, but even better to answer. When aggressively explored and honestly answered you will find that each individual has a responsibility for creating a workplace that is not only free of hazards but has clear rules which are followed. This primary point on your compass should detail expectations and operational rules for self realization of safety targets.

SOUTH - Safety is a team sport.

Successful safety requires a diverse range of skills and consequently success can only be achieved through involvement and teamwork. Use these skills to develop a team that is focused on creating an injury free workplace. People generally respect decisions, courses of action and targets of which they were involved in developing.

EAST - Executive guidance.

Organizations where everyone understands that they are individually and collectively responsible for safety are highly effective at eliminating hazards and reducing injuries. This understanding and acceptance of accountability is however determined by company executives and managers ability to guide them through committed visible leadership. Walking the talk reinforces responsibility, accountability and cooperation thus keeping each day pointed north.

“It's not only about where we are going but about how successfully we navigate the route”

By considering these compass point references, no matter which direction we turn everyone remains focused on safety and reaching our destination of zero harm becomes an ongoing realization of our efforts.

Behind the stats: Information management, your radar to success

By Gavin Bruwer

If an employee at your workplace does not have an accident this year, what is the underlying reason? Is it because your workplace has an effectively developed and implemented health and safety system, or is it simply pure luck? (Luck usually runs out.)

Effective record keeping is just as important as any other element of your safety program when it comes to avoiding workplace injuries and illnesses. Record keeping relates directly to our risk identification, assessment and reduction obligations in Section 8 of the OHS Act. Why do I say this? Quite simply risk is about information - the more information we have the better our opportunity of identifying and addressing specific outcomes. Where there is certainty of a specific outcome there can't be risk. Timely and efficient information can turn a looming disaster into a cost effective opportunity to reduce our risk footprint.

What information we gather and what we do with the information gathered is however critical and can make a huge difference in how we assess the integrity of our workplace health and safety program. Our safety program creates an operational work space in which information appears either as a deficiency or opportunity on the radar. Can you imagine a traffic controller trying to land 20 planes with none of them appearing on the radar??

So what information should we be gathering and managing?

Incident records

Traditionally this is one information aspect that is well recorded yet not often correlated or analyzed so as to add value to the program. Generally reporting is limited to the publication of a health and safety failure rate, rather than providing for proactive information management. The following key information could turn your records into a wealth of proactive risk prevention opportunities:

- When, time and day of occurrence - could highlight specific exposure times and days, etc.
- Where - in which area or department did it occur? This could highlight supervisory failures or environmental issues, etc.
- Who - This could highlight poor individual or group behaviour, lack of training or awareness, etc.
- What was involved (machinery, processes) - this could highlight poor equipment maintenance, changed operational processes, etc.

Although identifying the root cause of the incident is imperative to rectifying that single situation, correlating and analyzing all available information will provide a bigger picture, resulting in a reduced possibility of a repeat incident across the organization. Repeat incidents are unforgivable, so use all the information you have available, to your benefit.



Information management will highlight deficiencies and opportunities on your safety radar

“Risk is a measure of uncertainty, only to be alleviated by actionable information”



Stop guessing and start listening to the information that's available to you.

“All incidents can be prevented, if we manage our information. Stop recording for compliance and start analyzing for improvement”



Become a safety artist – allow the information to paint a picture

Near miss/hazard reporting

Having an entrenched near miss/hazard reporting and recording system is in most cases more important than the recording of incidents themselves. These are inevitably the pre-emptors of disaster and must be analyzed as a group rather than simply resolving one single issue. Analyzing these reports can determine trends and provide key information for risk control activities. Always look at the bigger picture, accidents can be prevented if we, gather, analyze and act on the information available.

Inspection

This is another invaluable source of risk control information. Properly recorded inspections will provide information on aspects of your program such as housekeeping, PPE compliance and maintenance of emergency and other safety equipment. All findings should be tabled and actioned. By doing this we will ensure closeout and distribution of valuable learning's. Group inspection findings into physical work environment and behavioural categories. A proper review of inspections will also highlight the safety competence and possible training requirements of the persons doing the inspections, and will assist in improving the quality.

Behaviour based observations

These can either be formal planned task observations, aimed at determining compliance with set procedures. Always address individual concerns but never forget to record findings and analyze along with other observations, as deviations from the procedure may be widespread and indicative of a flaw in the procedure itself.

A key to productive behaviour based observation and analysis is to determine the critical aspects of your program and define the reporting and measurement criteria. For example you might want to measure:

- PPE compliance.
- Completion of pre-task risk assessments.
- Monitor whether weekly or monthly safety meetings are being held.
- Critical equipment inspections are being done.
- Measure the level of housekeeping compliance across the company.
- Adherence to safe work procedures.
- Correct use of safety harnesses.
- Lockout and permit compliance.

These are all things we do on a daily basis, but often neglect to arrange and analyze. Information is the key to successful risk control and the more leading indicators we identify and monitor the better our chances of ensuring that our program, environment and individual behavior is pointed in the right direction.

The information is out there - it's for you to decide whether it's simply a source of measurement or a valuable aspect of your risk reduction program.

On a scale of 1-10 how much certainty is your information management system providing?

Mind the gap: Overcoming the biggest hurdle in safety

By Gavin Bruwer

One of the biggest mysteries is why well-trained people fail to follow their company's safe work practices. Consider the following statement: "The gap between knowing and not doing is much bigger than the gap between knowing and not knowing."

The gap between knowing and not knowing is easily overcome through training. The tough gap to overcome however is when people know something yet they fail to apply it.

It's not hard to find examples of the "knowing-doing" gap in our workplace. Consider how many times you find people welding without suitable eye protection or failing to tie off whilst working at heights. Unfortunately, the gap becomes all too real when investigating a workplace injury, where the injured failed to follow basic safe work practices that could have easily prevented the incident.

If you've ever been to London and used the underground rail system, you've no doubt heard the recorded voice loudly announcing "mind the gap" to remind embarking and disembarking passengers about the space between the platform and the train. It's as if we need to have that same voice to remind us to mind the gap between worker's knowledge and their actual performance.

It's essential that leaders recognize, and then do something about, the gap. Give some thought to your own workplace, and answer the following questions:

1. What evidence is there to indicate an existing knowledge/application gap?
2. How are supervisors trained and supported to deal with situations where workers fail to apply safe work practices correctly? Bear in mind that most supervisors have risen from the ranks of the workers.
3. When last have you as an organization reviewed your safe work practices and training for relevance and interest? Outdated, impractical and dull training can lead to apathy, which in turn reduces efficiency and adds to the gap.

As you consider your own workplace and find that you have room for improvement, these four guidelines provide some steps you can take:

1. Involve a cross section of employees in a review of all current safety procedures and standards. Get their input with regard to the application of these rules.
2. Print a hard copy of your entire health and safety system. Take a highlighter and mark every instance where you find the words "shall" and "will". These words are often misinterpreted and very loosely used in documents. The word shall means "without deviation" whereas the word will generally indicates a guideline. Ask yourself: Is it reasonably possible for workers to follow those rules that contain the word shall?
3. Does your safety manual include all the rules associated with your industry and are all employees trained in the application of these rules? Ensure that the gap between knowing and not knowing is addressed, as this gap would automatically give rise to failed application.
4. Avoid the typical desktop specialist review by creating participative review forums. Participation leads to ownership which in turn leads to acceptance and reinforced application.

Do whatever it takes to ensure that everyone knows the rules and how to apply them to their work, so you can have a workplace where everyone is mindful of the gap. This is the only way to ensure your workers can go home safely to their families.

It's all about application - It's that simple. One of the most important attributes of a good leader, whether a CEO or a supervisor, is to facilitate the application of appropriate knowledge.

What can you do to help others apply what they know?

Safety Topic – Preventing heat illness

Hot and dry/humid weather conditions can have dangerous health effects on workers who are unprepared. Exposure to high temperatures for long periods of time can increase the chance of illnesses such as sunburn, heat exhaustion, heat stroke or heat cramps. These illnesses can range from mild to severe and sometimes can result in death. Knowing what to do to prepare for and prevent these heat-related illnesses is better than having to treat them.

Normal body temperature is 37°C and heat stress sets in where the body temperature rapidly rises beyond this to 41°C. This is a life threatening condition, requiring prompt and competent treatment.

Who is susceptible to heat related illness?

- New employees - it can take up to 2 months for people to acclimatize to heat and the specific work environment.
- Older persons can be less resilient and often succumb to excessive heat exposure.
- Any person who is exposed to excessive temperatures for an extended period of time.
- Persons who are under the influence of alcohol or suffering the consequences of alcohol intake.
- Foreigners - persons who are not used to the natural climate of the area.
- Any person who is feeling ill or whose body is weakened due to illness.

Recognizing the symptoms of heat disorders:

- Extreme fatigue
- General weariness
- Muscular weakness
- Muscle cramps
- Nausea and vomiting
- Mental disturbance/argumentative
- Failure to sweat - serious!

Treating the symptoms of heat disorders:

If a person displays one or more of the above symptoms then you should immediately notify your clinic or doctor, requesting assistance.

- Move the individual to a cool well ventilated area.
- Attempt to reduce the core temperature of the body to below 39°C.
- Spray the person with tepid water - to simulate sweating.
- Increase air movement around the body.
- When stable remove the individual to a clinic or doctor for treatment.

The most effective way of reducing core temperature is **NOT** to immerse the person with ice-cold water, but rather as described above. This could lead to shock as the body further increases its temperature to counter the cold water. The aim should be to stimulate sweating and natural cooling of the body. Get the exposed individual to medical care as soon as possible - Heat Stress kills.

Working in hot weather doesn't have to be a killer if you're prepared for it. Dress appropriately, remember to drink often during the day, take needed rest breaks in cool shaded areas, and recognize the signs of over-heating.



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