

Improve your Safety Performance through Consultation

One of the best ways to improve your company safety performance is to consult with your workforce on matters of health and safety. Employers have a legal duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act to consult with their workers and others who may be affected by your activities.

You don't need complicated systems and it doesn't need to take much of your time to consult with your workers, and the benefits can save you money by making your procedures more efficient and by reducing accidents and incidents, therefore reducing compensation claims against the company.

Consultation should be a two-way process, so listen and talk to your workforce about;

- Health and safety in general and how it affects the work they do.
- What hazards have been identified and how they're being controlled.
- The different ways they will be provided with information and training.

Allow staff and others to raise their health and safety concerns and include them in any decision making process. Your workforce will often see hazards that you may not be aware of. Following serious accidents, it's often commented upon within accident investigation interviews that "we knew what we were doing was wrong, but it's how we've always done it", or similar comments.

In larger organisations, you might consult through employee health and safety representatives, while in smaller companies you may decide to consult with your employees directly.

Through experience, it can be seen that companies that actively involve their workforce in health and safety through consultation and active involvement, generally have a better safety performance record with fewer lost time accidents and incidents.

What you need to be doing

You need to provide health and safety information to your workforce on;

- Your risk assessments and any control measures you have put into place, including protective equipment requirements.
- What to do in an emergency.
- Special controls for vulnerable workers e.g. new or expectant mothers.
- Any changes to established procedures and working methods e.g. following the introduction of new equipment, machinery or working process.

How can you achieve this?

You can meet your consultation responsibilities in different ways, including;

- Undertaking safety induction training on first employment.
- Using posters and signs around the workplace.
- Carry out regular safety talks with your employees.
- Have information translated if you employ foreign workers who do not have a good level of understanding of spoken or written English.

- Involve your workforce in all levels of health and safety management. In particular, involve them when undertaking risk assessments as they're more likely to follow control measures if they've been involved in the identification of those controls.

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