Communicating Health and Safety

communicating Occupational Health and Safety in the workplace
Communicating Health and Safety

Australian Light Manufacturing Industry Training Advisory Board
National English Language & Literacy (WELL) Project

Occupational Health & Safety Project
1997
The Australian Light Manufacturing Industry Training Advisory Board is the national organisation responsible for development and implementation of training and training policy in the light manufacturing industries. Its mission is to ensure the development of a flexible, well-trained and highly skilled workforce at all levels and to improve the capacity of companies to perform in a world competitive environment. The Board is an incorporated company with members from both companies and unions.

Chairperson
Alastair Lee

General Manager
Susan Woodward

Project Manager
Jack Cunningham, National WELL Project Coordinator
Australian Light Manufacturing ITAB

Writer
Kate Nash

Production
Gill Miller Press

ISBN: 095 871 7014

Acknowledgements
Thanks are due to the companies and individuals who participated in this project.

Cover Design
Keycraft Pty Ltd

© 1997 Commonwealth of Australia
Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
Funded under the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program by the Commonwealth through the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
## Contents

**Chairman's letter** 1

**Overview** 3

**The project**

**OHS strategies: Potential for communication skills training**

1. Developing an integrated OHS strategy 7
2. OHS committees 8
3. OHS policy manual 8
4. Monitoring health and safety performance 8
5. Accident and incident investigations 9
6. Conducting a health and safety audit 9
7. Hazard identification and risk assessment 9
8. Emergency procedures 10
9. Health and safety induction program 10
10. Use of notice boards 10
11. Continuous improvement teams 10
12. Developing purchasing policy 11
13. Obtaining and monitoring permits to work 11
14. First-aid training 11
15. Protective clothing policies and monitoring 11
16. Labelling, storing and handling hazardous materials 11
17. Signage 11
18. Housekeeping audits 12

**Developing an Enterprise Based Teacher (EBT) teaching program based on OHS** 13

The enterprise-based teacher’s role 13
Steps in developing a teaching plan based on OHS 13

**Case examples** 15

1. Developing an integrated OHS strategy 15
2. OHS committee training check list 18
3. OHS committee terms of reference 19
4. How the OHS committee functions 20
5. OHS policy manual 21
6. Health and safety audit 22
7. Sources of workplace hazards 23
8. Emergency procedures 24
9. Mapping safety features 25
10. Induction program 26
11. Use of notice boards 29
12. Continuous improvement teams 30
13. Using SafetyMAP 31

**Appendix 1: Reading guide** 33

**Appendix 2: Acknowledgments** 35
Communicating Health and Safety

Improving health and safety is an important challenge for many enterprises.

Every day, workers confront health and safety risks in their workplaces, and a key ingredient of business success is performing well in workplace health and safety.

All members of any workplace share the responsibility for occupational health and safety. Management and employees need good communication skills to build and maintain safe workplaces.

This report will assist enterprises, as they develop and implement an OHS improvement program, to understand the communication issues involved, and to develop these issues into a training plan.

Many aspects of OHS have the potential for communication skills training. This report examines some of these through notes and case examples.

Finally, the report provides guidelines for enterprise-based teachers in designing and delivering communication skills training programs within the context of OHS improvement.
Overview

Manufacturing processes are becoming technologically more complex, mechanised and capital intensive. They are also introducing a growing array of materials, natural and synthetic, into the manufacturing cycle.

At the same time, global markets and capital costs are forcing manufacturers to squeeze every drop of production from their technical and human resources. In addition, the number of cultures, language groups and societies in Australia’s manufacturing workforce is expanding all the time.

In this environment, health and safety of the workforce is crucial.

As one senior manager put it, ‘Our workplace lives or dies on our capacity to deal with OHS. In this situation, we can’t afford to rely on just one group, the OHS committee, or on a one-off, fixed program. We have to be tackling OHS issues in every possible context’.

One of the obstacles to improving health and safety performance in the current climate is the persistence of what John Mathews in Health and Safety at Work (1993) has described as ‘the myth of the careless worker’. According to this view, it is the worker who is primarily responsible for accidents or ill-health at work. Thus, employees must be educated, cajoled and, if necessary, threatened into taking the preventive and ameliorating actions that will make the workplace a safe and healthy place in which to spend one-third or more of their lives.

Adopting this limited view in a multicultural workplace means covering walls with safety messages in a multitude of languages. It means using interpreters to ensure the workforce is fully briefed on its safety responsibilities and understands the consequences of failure to comply with requirements. It may also mean going to the considerable lengths of teaching English in the workplace.

This report suggests a different approach. It is based on Mathews’s premise that, ‘It is in the context of a generally shared responsibility for the provision of a good working environment, that workers individually should be expected to exercise their own responsibility for safe and careful behaviour’.

In Managing Occupational Health and Safety in Australia, Michael Quinlan & Philip Bohle distinguish between three categories of workplace risks:

- Physical hazards deriving from noise, vibration, excessive heat and cold, rapid temperature change and electromagnetic radiation.
- Hazardous substances including chemicals, minerals, mineral fibres, coal, oil, petroleum, dusts and other airborne pollutants, and infectious agents.
- Risks arising from the organisation of work that create pressures on individuals; for example, manual handling procedures, physical working environments, workloads, supervisory arrangements and the timing of work particularly shift work.

In the category of work organisation, Quinlan & Bohle describe:

- Intensification of work, and the increasing capacity to monitor performance through technological and other means.
- Growing mechanisation of the workplace, and more complex interactions between labour and equipment.
- Shift and night work, which is becoming increasingly important for enterprises as they seek to recover large capital investments.
- Growth in self-employment, subcontracting or ‘outworking’.

3
Best practice enterprises adopt a systems approach to managing OHS. These systems include:
- Policy and planning to determine OHS objectives and strategies.
- Allocation of responsibilities and accountability arrangements for meeting these objectives.
- Systematic identification, assessment and control of hazards.
- Participation and consultation by managers and workers in determining ways to improve health and safety.
- Education and training of managers and workers.
- Auditing to ensure the system is implemented and performing against objectives.


If employees are to contribute to building and maintaining safe workplaces, they need good communication skills. This includes facility with the English language (for example, reading, writing, talking) and specialist skills for recognising, analysing and reporting technical and workplace-specific information.

All employees must be able to raise safety issues and alert managers and fellow workers to safety problems. They need to have the skills to identify machine malfunctioning and environmental problems, and to participate in problem solving and committees. In addition, their language skills need to be developed sufficiently to understand and follow safety procedures.

Achieving a healthy and safe workplace requires much more than communication skills, but without communication, good practice in health and safety will be unobtainable.
In 1996, the Australian Light Manufacturing Industry Advisory Board allocated funds to investigate the communication skills needed in relation to best practice within OHS in light manufacturing enterprises.

The project was conducted in a number of Melbourne workplaces including a laundry, a textile and furnishing company, a tannery and several clothing factories.

In each enterprise, an enterprise-based teacher was being funded by the Commonwealth Government's Workplace English Language and Literacy program. This program is designed to improve business success by increasing communication skills in the workplace. In each case, the company's submission for funding had focused on improving workplace health and safety practice.

Information was also sought from workplace language teachers working on health and safety issues in a variety of industries, employer organisations, unions, and published materials.

The project had three objectives:
• To extend understanding of the ways in which communication skills training can enhance effective health and safety practices.
• To develop ideas and materials to assist enterprise-based teachers to work constructively in non-classroom settings using OHS as a base for improving workplace communication skills.

• To present practical ideas for managers, consultative committees and safety committees about:
  -- Focusing on the specific OHS issues that are important to their enterprise through improving workplace communication skills.
  -- Empowering their workforce to take responsibility for OHS by improving their communication skills.
  -- Using enterprise-based teachers effectively within the workplace.

Two of the workplaces in this project had recently established OHS committees. In one case, this had been precipitated by a serious accident; in the other, it was part of an extended company effort to establish systems to ensure quality production.
OHS strategies: Potential for communication skills training

Attending to occupational health and safety is not only a legal requirement for all enterprises; it is also a key element in business success.

Some companies have a systematic strategy for OHS improvement integrated within a holistic approach to organisational improvement. In this situation, the communication skills training program can help to link OHS to the broader issues of workplace change and performance improvement.

Other firms, perhaps not yet ready to tackle the broader challenges of whole system change, may focus on OHS as a particular area for improvement. Here, too, a communication skills training program can provide invaluable assistance to the OHS improvement effort.

This section OHS strategies provides notes on of a variety of strategies employed in Australian enterprises in their attempts to raise OHS performance. The section Case Examples (pp 15–31) document specific instances of ways in which many of these strategies have been developed or applied.

Each strategy presents an opportunity to develop a communication skills training plan that will assist employees by improving their English language skills, and support the company in its efforts to improve performance.

By appropriately choosing from this array of strategies for the enterprise, an individual enterprise-based teacher could develop a teaching plan based wholly, or in part, on health and safety considerations.

The strategies presented are:
1. Developing an integrated OHS strategy
2. OHS committees
3. OHS policy manual
4. Monitoring health and safety performance
5. Accident and incident investigations
6. Conducting a health and safety audit
7. Hazard identification and risk assessment
8. Emergency procedures
9. Health and safety induction program
10. Use of notice boards
11. Continuous improvement teams
12. Developing purchasing policy
13. Obtaining and monitoring permits to work
14. First-aid training
15. Protective clothing policies and monitoring
16. Labelling, storing and handling hazardous materials
17. Signage
18. Housekeeping audits

1. Developing an integrated OHS strategy

Health and safety issues are often tackled in a piecemeal fashion. For example, an OHS committee may be set up as a self-contained entity with no substantial connection to other initiatives. The committee may focus on specific problems or 'hot spots' as needs arise.

An alternative approach is to view OHS improvement as a coordinated contributor to enterprise improvement. In the example of the OHS committee, (see Strategy No. 2) it is seen as connecting to a number of other working groups and improvement strategies. Its work is structured to make a coherent contribution to overall enterprise performance and management accountability.

See Case example 1: Developing an integrated OHS strategy
2. OHS committees

In Australia, State legislation sets the rules for procedures to be adopted in individual enterprises to meet health and safety obligations.

In a large number of manufacturing companies, this leads to the formation of a health and safety committee, usually comprising equal numbers of management and workforce representatives.

The roles and functions of these committees vary but usually encompass establishing policy on health and safety issues, monitoring activities and performance on the issues, and ensuring necessary information is communicated to all employees.

It is important for an OHS committee to have clear terms of reference that enable members and other employees to understand committee responsibilities, roles and procedures.

From the terms of reference, an enterprise-based communication skills teacher could develop a simple check list to audit committee members' skills in relevant areas, and a training program to ensure the committee is fully competent to carry out its roles and responsibilities.

Some enterprise-based teachers work regularly with the OHS committee to facilitate communications within meetings and in their broader responsibilities.

See Case examples:
2: OHS committee training check list
3: OHS committee terms of reference
4: How the OHS committee functions

3. OHS policy manual

The OHS policy manual incorporates all specific health and safety policies, procedures and standards for a specific organisation.

In its complete form, the manual needs to be available and accessible in all areas of the enterprise. Some firms provide all employees with an abbreviated version of the manual so they have immediate access to information that concerns them.

An enterprise-based communication skills teacher can play an important role in putting together this more accessible and useful version, and in ensuring it is distributed and understood.

See Case example 5. OHS policy manual

4. Monitoring health and safety performance

All companies need to keep data on safety performance (accidents, incidents, injuries and so on) and are required to report serious incidents to relevant authorities.

While workers’ compensation insurance requires accidents to be reported, it is also important to ensure ‘near misses’ and other incidents do not pass unrecorded. These records provide significant information to the enterprise about its safety policies and practices.

The critical questions for workplace communications relate to how this information is collected, and what use is made of it. For example:

- Are reporting forms the responsibility only of supervisors, or are all members of the workforce expected to complete them? Are they easy to use, or couched in difficult language, or obscure in what they are asking for?
- Is the information gathered relayed back to the workforce in some form? Is it used in ways that are likely to encourage greater attention to safe practices?
- Is it conveyed through channels appropriate to the
communication skills of the workforce?
• Are there systems in place that use this data for planning and developing new work practices?

An enterprise-based communications teacher can work with a committee or individuals to ensure the means of collecting data are effective and that report forms and other mechanisms are clear and comprehensible. They can also play an important role in developing strategies to introduce these to the workforce and encouraging employees to use them effectively.

Information gained from the forms needs to be made available and accessible to those whose work is affected, and those who are responsible for developing changes in work practices.

See Case example 10: Use of notice boards

5. Accident and incident investigations

Investigating accidents, near misses and other incidents is an extremely important part of safety improvement, and must be carried out carefully and thoroughly.

It is important that employees are actively involved in these investigations. They are likely to have crucial information and insights about causes and future prevention strategies; and usually they must implement any resulting changes in practice.

For these reasons, reporting practices need to be well thought out. Forms must be useful and comprehensible, and supplemented by face-to-face discussions, usually on-site. A communication skills teacher can work with employees to ensure all these steps are carried out effectively.

6. Conducting a health and safety audit

Conducting an audit of OHS systems and activities across an enterprise can be an effective starting place for developing an OHS improvement plan.

A number of professional and commercial bodies can be contracted to undertake safety audits, and some operations are required by law to be subject to external inspection. However, given adequate resourcing and time, there is no reason why an enterprise cannot carry out much of its own audit.

An enterprise-based communication skills teacher could provide considerable assistance to such a project by working with groups and individuals who have the responsibility to carry out elements of the audit process.

See Case example 6: Health and safety audit

7. Hazard identification and risk assessment

All workplaces are hazardous in particular ways. The important task is to assess the risks associated with each hazard, and to develop ways of controlling the risk. This can be done by removing the hazard, or minimising the risk.

Employees are a critical source of information about actual and potential hazards, and how these can be tackled.

The enterprise-based teacher can work with employees to identify hazards, and to develop and implement solutions.

See Case example 7: Sources of workplace hazards
8. Emergency procedures

All workplaces are required to establish clear procedures for emergency situations: fire, explosion, toxic spillage and so on.

It is also essential that everyone in the workplace understands the procedures and their role in the event of an emergency.

The enterprise-based teacher can help with developing procedures and explanatory materials, and assist in developing and implementing training programs.

See Case examples: 8: Emergency procedures
9. Mapping safety features

9. Health and safety induction program

Communicating about health and safety issues is a crucial part of any induction program. New employees need to understand the procedures in place, what their responsibilities are, and how they can contribute to improving practices.

In many workplaces where a large number of new employees have non-English speaking backgrounds, enterprise-based communication skills teachers play a key role in induction programs. In addition to assisting program development, they may produce materials and participate in program delivery.

See Case example 10: Induction program

10. Use of notice boards

Notice boards dedicated to OHS issues are common in workplaces. It is also common for them to be neglected in terms of the currency of their content, and the attention paid to them by the workforce.

However, with effort and imagination, notice boards can be a useful tool for communication and participation.

Enterprise-based communication skills teachers can plan a significant role here.

See Case example 11: Use of notice boards

11. Continuous improvement teams

Strategies for continuous improvement in processes, products and service are key features of quality accreditation and other quality management strategies. An important element is recording performance and measuring improvement.

Improving health and safety procedures is often an important focus for continuous improvement teams.

The fundamental tool of continuous improvement is the familiar learning cycle:

Plan

Review

Act

Reflect

Continuous improvement is a learning process. Changes are planned, acted on, the results measured and analysed, and the outcomes reviewed to form the basis of further planning and actions.

An enterprise-based teacher can provide valuable assistance to continuous improvement teams as they identify issues, develop actions and review performance.

See Case example 12: Continuous improvement teams
12. Developing purchasing policy
Where a company uses potentially hazardous materials or equipment, there is an opportunity for input into purchasing policy from an OHS perspective.

The enterprise-based teacher can work with the OHS committee or other appropriate body or individuals to ensure the policy is clear, properly publicised and implemented.

13. Obtaining and monitoring permits to work
Permits must be sought for certain activities in some workplaces for example, ‘hot work’. It is important that all relevant members of the workforce understand and can access the procedures for obtaining such permits.

An enterprise-based teacher can assist the workforce to meet these requirements.

14. First-aid training
First-aid training is important in all workplaces and, in some cases, it may be necessary to have large numbers of trained first aiders. Usually, this training is provided by outside experts, but an enterprise-based teacher can play an important role in ensuring all employees know how to get first-aid assistance when they need it.

15. Protective clothing policies and monitoring
Many manufacturing processes require certain groups of employees to wear protective clothing. Often visitors as well as employees must use protective equipment (for example, safety glasses, hearing protection) in designated areas.

A useful part of the enterprise-based teacher’s work may be developing programs to ensure these requirements are implemented.

16. Labelling, storing and handling hazardous materials
Where hazardous materials are used in production processes, they must be labelled properly, stored safely, and handled according to clearly specified procedures.

An enterprise-based teacher can play a crucial role in workplace safety by ensuring all employees can recognise the labelling and understand storage and handling procedures.

17. Signage
Signs are an important way of informing and reminding people of hazards and responsibilities. Often, however, signs are poorly designed, fail to communicate their message, or are placed inappropriately.

The communication skills teacher can work with employees and management to ensure signage is effective.
18. Housekeeping audits

Housekeeping audits are designed to encourage work groups to maintain their workplaces tidily, cleanly and safely.

They are most effective when they are designed by the work groups, and the enterprise-based teacher can usefully work with groups to develop their specific audit tool.
Developing an Enterprise Based Teacher (EBT) teaching program based on OHS

The enterprise-based teacher's role

An enterprise-based teacher can play an important role in OHS improvement by assisting the development of the communication skills that are critical for workforces to understand, and address health and safety issues.

An effective enterprise-based teacher becomes part of the firm, not just an adjunct providing a narrow set of training services. The training they offer is the result of the partnership between the teacher, the firm's management and employees. In the Language Literacy and Workplace Change report, Wyse & Pearson note that, 'Over time...as outsiders to the process they were seen as being non-partisan and therefore able to encourage debate of issues that may well be industrially sensitive' (p. 83).

The enterprise-based teacher who understands OHS issues and initiatives will be able to create a communication skills program that connects OHS to the broader issues of workplace improvement.

Steps in developing a teaching plan based on OHS

The enterprise-based teacher can contribute significantly to a company's health and safety improvement program as soon as they walk through the door. There will almost certainly be many areas of OHS where effective communication is inhibited by inadequate language, literacy and numeracy skills. It is not necessary to wait for a full scale audit of individual's language skills before making a start.

1. Read the culture

The enterprise-based teacher needs to be able to read the climate or 'culture' for a company's OHS initiative. In this way they can understand the extent to which OHS is an element in an integrated approach to performance improvement, or an isolated effort. Some questions to consider are:

• Is there an OHS committee? How long has it been functioning? Does it have clear terms of reference? Has it engaged in any training for its work?
• Are there representative committees other than OHS? What are these and how do they operate?
• How do employees participate in discussions or decisions about the way work is organised and carried out?
• Is there a training plan for skilling the workforce across all the areas relevant to production?
• Are there systems for measuring and evaluating performance? Are these individually based or group based?
• Does the pay system reward employees who observe safety measures or does it encourage them to 'cut corners'?
• Is there a public statement of organisation's purposes and strategic goals? Are health and safety issues reflected at this level?
• Does the company have a clearly written OHS policy?
• Has the company developed an OHS improvement strategy?
• Is there a training program in place to support OHS improvement?
• What roles do senior managers, including the chief executive, play in relation to OHS?

2. Set objectives for the program

This needs to be done in collaboration with the appropriate management and employee groups (for example, the OHS committee) and will depend on the answers to the questions above.

Broadly, the objectives will focus on the critical areas of need for improvement in OHS performance. They will take into account any specific training strategies already in place that relate to OHS or have health and safety components.

As far as possible, the objectives for communication skills training to support OHS improvement should reflect the company's broader improvement goals and strategies.
To be able to deal sensitively and accurately with issues that arise as well as represent the views of all stakeholders, the teacher needs to understand not only what the company hopes to achieve but how this fits in with the company’s goals for the future and what the real implications of the changes will be for employees at all levels of the organisation.

(Wyse & Pearson, p. 70)

Some examples of objectives for a communication skills teaching program focusing on OHS might be:

- Developing the communication skills of the OHS committee.
- Creating and implementing a useful safety induction booklet.
- Streamlining and making accessible an existing OHS manual.
- Training staff in reporting and analysing safety incidents.
- Creating effective health and safety communication systems across the workplace.

The Victorian WorkCover Authority has developed the Safety Management Achievement Program (SafetyMAP). This management system framework assists organisations to manage their health and safety responsibilities. Some enterprise-based teachers have found this to be a very useful base for working with companies to develop an OHS improvement plan and associated communication skills training.

3. Determine the program scope

Decisions about who training will be provided for also need to be made through discussions with managers and workforce.

The need to improve communication skills will probably apply across the organisation including managers, supervisors, workforce members and support staff.

Targets might include:
- Working with managers and employees to create or review their OHS policy.
- Setting up and training an OHS committee.
- Conducting an audit of the OHS skills and competencies of managers and workforce.
- Working with the OHS committee on specific communication strategies such as reporting procedures, workforce information programs, plain English usage in manuals, signs, instructions and so on.
- Reviewing forms with administrative staff.

4. Identify skills and information needed

Given the program objectives and the groups to be targeted, the next step is to determine the key skills and information the work groups will need to operate effectively in relation to OHS. This should also be done through consultation with managers and employees.

5. Create a program

The communication skills teaching program will specify the methods and approaches to be used in training delivery and how outcomes will be evaluated. It will also identify priorities for specific elements in the program and timelines for implementation.

6. Gather resources

Any materials available within the company (for example, relating to existing training programs and policies) will usually be the starting point for teaching materials.

A wide variety of resources and materials is available from external sources. Some of these are listed in appendix 2.
Case examples

Case example no. 1

Developing an integrated OHS strategy

A light manufacturing (laundry sector) company had recently established a health and safety committee. It comprises three workforce representatives from the three production departments, the human resources and operations managers.

At the same time, the company was pursuing quality accreditation. This necessitated developing operating procedures, a skills audit, competency assessment and training plans.

To support these activities, the company established a number of continuous improvement groups to investigate specific production areas and recommend changes in work organisation, work practices and decision-making processes.

The health and safety committee believed, in this context, it was important that OHS be seen and dealt with as a company-wide responsibility linking appropriately to these other initiatives. To achieve this, the committee’s first step was to develop an OHS strategy plan for the whole organisation.

They used the following table, based on Quinlan & Bohle’s Managing Occupational Health and Safety in Australia: A Multidisciplinary Approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental modification and monitoring</th>
<th>Individual screening and monitoring</th>
<th>Individual behaviour change</th>
<th>Organisational strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hazard identification</td>
<td>Pre-employment examinations</td>
<td>Health and safety education</td>
<td>Workplace OHS committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering controls</td>
<td>Return-to-work examinations</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Health surveys and audits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ergonomic intervention</td>
<td>Medical monitoring</td>
<td>Behaviour modification</td>
<td>Work reorganisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective clothing and equipment</td>
<td>Biological monitoring</td>
<td>Administrative controls</td>
<td>On-site health and safety centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stress management</td>
<td>Health promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The strategies appearing as bold in the table were already the basis for some kind of company action or system development. The other areas had not been tackled. The committee identified the areas it wished to continue or begin working on, and defined specific steps or activities relating to each one. The entire set of activities developed in this way was then discussed with managers, supervisors and work groups.

Following this widespread consultation, the committee identified items it considered would comprise a holistic strategy for OHS in the company for the coming 12 months. Each item was developed with a number of action categories: specific steps to be taken, who would be responsible, expected outcomes and timeline. The result is outlined below.

Table 2: Company Activities for Managing OHS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Specific steps</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| OHS policy manual | 1. Full version for each site:  
• Emergency procedures  
• First aid  
• Hazardous goods  
• OHS committee  
• Safety programs  
• Reporting arrangements  
• Evaluation procedures  
• Training  
• Licences  
• Protective clothing and equipment  
2. Abridged version for induction | • HRM  
• OHS Committee  
• WELL teacher | • Full version to departments  
• Abridged version to each employee | End December 1996 |

| Identification of staff members with major OHS responsibilities | Definition and nomination of:  
• Emergency responsibilities  
• OHS committees  
• First aiders | OHS committee | • Notice boards  
• OHS manual  
• Minuted monthly meetings with resolving actions | Monthly meetings of OHS committee |

| Policy making and advisory channels | Monthly division review, including situation review of accidents/injuries  
• Communications:  
  • Management team  
  • OHS committee  
  • Supervision  
  • Representatives  
  • Employees | HR Manager | • HRM reports to CEO | Monthly |

...
## Procedures for continuing evaluation and improvement of OHS performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific steps</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Housekeeping audit</td>
<td>Committee members</td>
<td>• Notice boards</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Safety audits</td>
<td>Line managers</td>
<td>• Report to CEO</td>
<td>As per quality procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maintenance audits (via quality audits)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• As per quality procedures</td>
<td>ASAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Incident/accident/injury reports</td>
<td>All employees</td>
<td>• Completed injuries register</td>
<td>ASAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accident investigations</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Completed accident investigation with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td>recommendations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Licensing</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Review</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessing and monitoring hazards and hazardous materials/substances (e.g., noise, asbestos, dust)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Identification of licensing requirements</td>
<td>As required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Preventive measures to eliminate hazards; e.g., equipment, clothing, non-smoking</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Schedule of review and implementation</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Modifications to structures, physical environment, procedures; e.g.:</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Advice &amp; follow-up</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Floor surfaces</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Asbestos register</td>
<td>- Established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work station spaces</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Noise survey</td>
<td>- Two-yearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Jobs around forklifts</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Advice and follow-up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Machine guarding</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Separate assessment for each machine and task</td>
<td>End 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Manual handling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Purchase policy

- **Evaluate all new equipment before purchase**
- **Purchasing officer and line managers**
- **Pre-purchase hazard assessment**
- **As required**

### Toxic substances

- **Notification**
- **Minimisation**
- **Maintenance and Stores**
- **Labelling**
- **Handling and storage procedures/training**
- **Ongoing**

### Training

- **Manual handling**
- **Noise and hearing conservation**
- **Machine guarding observance**
- **Emergency procedures**
- **Use of protective equipment**
- **Forklift licensing**
- **First aid**
- **OHS committee members with train-the-trainer qualifications**
- **Induction**
- **Revision**
- **Follow-up**
- **Licensing for forklift**
- **On-the-job**
- **Off-the-job: First aid**
- **To be determined**

### Strategy review

- **Employee suggestions**
- **Safety committee actions**
- **Meeting of all those with safety responsibilities across the company**
- **OHS committee**
- **Management team**
- **Suggestions via notice boards**
- **Strategy review by company-wide group**
- **Ongoing**
- **November 1996**
Case example no. 2

OHS committee training check list

Worksafe Australia has developed the following check list to assist OHS committees identify their training needs.

Information and policy:
• Developing health and safety policies and procedures.
• Defining health and safety responsibilities and duties for including in job descriptions and duty statements.
• Identifying the financial and human resources needed for managing health and safety.
• Providing information on systems and procedures to everyone in the organisation.

Consultation:
• Establishing ways for all employees to be consulted about health and safety matters.
• Resolving matters raised during consultation.
• Explaining outcomes of participation and consultation to all employees.

Identifying hazards:
• Developing procedures to identify hazards.
• Identifying hazards.
• Monitoring work activities to ensure procedures are being followed.
• Taking steps to avoid creating new hazards.

Assessing risks:
• Developing procedures for assessing risks.
• Assessing risks.
• Monitoring work activities to ensure procedures are being followed.

Controlling risks:
• Developing ways to control risks.
• Devising interim ways to control risks if immediate solutions are not possible.
• Developing procedures for ongoing control of risks.
• Monitoring activities to ensure procedures are being followed.
• Identifying inadequacies in existing risk control measures.

Hazardous events:
• Identifying potential hazardous/events.
• Developing procedures to control risks associated with hazardous events.
• Providing information and training to all employees on how to respond to a hazardous event.

Employee training needs:
• Developing a training program to meet employees’ needs for health and safety training.
• Integrating health and safety training with the broader training program of the enterprise.
• Ensuring all employees have access to health and safety training.

Record keeping:
• Establishing a system for keeping health and safety records and training records so any patterns can be monitored.

Evaluation:
• Assessing the effectiveness of the health and safety system.
• Making improvements to the system.
• Assessing compliance with health and safety legislation and codes of practice.
• Assessing the impact of training.
Case example no. 3

OHS committee terms of reference

In Health and Safety at Work, John Mathews (1993) suggests the following arrangements for workplace health and safety committees:

- In each plant or establishment, health and safety matters will be dealt with through a joint management–union health and safety committee.
- These committees will have, as their terms of reference, the consideration of any matter relevant to workers' health and safety raised by management or by health and safety representatives.
- There will be management representatives and an equal number of union representatives on the committee and it will be chaired by a member of the committee. The size of the committee should be kept as small as practicable.
- Management representatives will include the plant managing director, the director of production and the director of personnel or industrial relations.
- Union representatives should come from among local health and safety representatives, although corporate officials and union, ACTU or ACTU State branch officials may attend as observers, with prior notification.
- Occupational health staff should be non-voting consultants to the committee and attend meetings in that capacity.
- Committee members will be appointed for a period of two years and be eligible for re-appointment. Elections should be staggered to ensure continuity.
- The committee may call experts or consultants as the need arises.
- The committees will regularly consider:
  - Written reports on accidents and injuries, and recommendations as to how such accidents and injuries can be avoided in the future.
  - Results of all environmental and personal monitoring carried out at the workplace. The causes for any unusually high concentrations of any toxic material will be investigated, and recommendations for their elimination considered.
- Results of all medical monitoring (in aggregate) and recommendations.
- No new chemicals or physical agents or new installations or processes that may be harmful to health shall be introduced into establishments until all available data concerning their likely health effects have been evaluated and their use endorsed by the committee. In the case of chemicals, full available data on chemical identity and toxicity will be supplied.
- The committees shall develop joint policies on a range of preventive measures such as the safe handling of toxic materials, environmental and personal monitoring, medical monitoring and other matters.
- The committees shall consider and settle health and safety matters referred to them that have been the subject of dispute and not resolved at local workplace level. The committees shall also have access to reports and information on matters resolved at the local workplace level.
- The committees shall meet regularly with a minimum of at least six times a year. Emergency meetings can be called by a procedure to be agreed upon. If there is a failure to agree on any item brought before the committee, this matter will be referred to a higher company committee or to a mutually acceptable consultant. Committees will operate on the basis of solving problems as close to the workplace as possible, and arrive at decisions and recommendations by consensus. Decisions of committees will be posted for all employees to see.
- The committees will determine the adequacy of health and safety training programs within the establishment.
Case example no. 4

How the OHS committee functions

Some of the questions that can be pursued to understand how a committee functions in a particular workplace could include:

- What is the composition of the committee? Are all groups of workers (for example, departments) represented? What is the numerical balance between managers and workforce representatives? Were the workforce representatives elected, or appointed?
- Does the committee have formal, clear terms of reference describing their major functions? Do these include policy formulation, monitoring and dissemination of information to employees?
- Are there separate union safety representatives across the organisation and, if so, how do these people connect to the committee’s work?
- How senior are the management representatives on the OHS committee?
- Has the committee established clear procedures for its work?
- How do committee members report back to the workforce, individually and as a committee?
Case example no. 5

OHS policy manual

In one company, the health and safety manual included policies and procedures for each of the following:

• Statement of responsibilities
• Accident investigation
• Housekeeping
• Emergency management and procedures
• Fire prevention
• First aid
• Drugs and alcohol
• Hazardous materials
• Health and safety committee and representatives
• Induction
• Manual handling
• Noise control
• Office safety
• Rehabilitation
• Resolution of issues and consultative procedures
• Safety audits and inspections
• Protective clothing and equipment
• Work permits
• Forklift safety

This extensive document incorporated full statements for each area. It was abridged to a 30-page booklet, presented attractively, and provided to every employee. The enterprise-based teacher played a significant role in putting together this more accessible and useful version.
Case example no. 6

Health and safety audit

The Australian Chamber of Manufactures has developed the following list of items as the basis for auditing OHS within an enterprise:

- Existence of an OHS policy.
- Identification of health and safety representatives and an OHS committee.
- Agreed procedures for safety representatives and OHS committee operation.
- OHS training.
- Management accountability procedures or performance measurement in relation to OHS.
- Procedures for reporting and recording accidents, incidents, injuries.
- Procedures for investigation of accidents and incidents.
- Procedures for safe operation of forklifts.
- *Dealing with hazardous materials:
  - Storage.
  - Labelling.
  - Ventilation.
- First aid provision and training.
- Work environment issues, for example:
  - Storage facilities.
  - Change rooms.
  - Washing facilities.
  - Emergency showers/eye baths.
  - Heating and cooling.
  - Aisles and passageways.
  - Lighting.
  - Seating.
  - Floor surfaces.
  - Workstation space.
- Manual handling procedures.
- Machine guarding equipment and procedures.
- *Plant: documented process for all machinery, equipment, appliances, implements and tools in relation to:
  - Identification of hazards.
  - Assessment of risks.
  - Control measures.
- *Boiler and pressure vessels: independent assessment required and registration if necessary.
- Emergency management and procedures, including:
  - *Display of fire hoses, extinguishers and exit signs.
  - Identification of roles and responsibilities.
  - Evacuation program.
  - Training in evacuation procedures.
- *Asbestos related procedures, including:
  - Identification.
  - Risk assessment.
  - Prevention of exposure.
- *Noise: where employee exposure exceeds recommended standards, provision of:
  - Noise survey every five years.
  - Audiometry tests within first three months of employment and every two years thereafter.

(Items marked * have specific legal requirements attaching to them, and usually require some kind of outside assessment.)
Case example no. 7

Sources of workplace hazards

The ACM Plant Safety Program identifies the following list of possible sources of hazards in the workplace:
- Entanglement
- Crushing
- Cutting, stabbing and puncturing
- Shearing
- Friction
- Striking
- High pressure fluid
- Electrical
- Explosion
- Sliding, tripping and falling
- Ergonomic
- Suffocation
- High temperature or fire
- Temperature (thermal comfort)
- Chemicals
- Toxic gases or vapours
- Fumes/dust
- Noise
- Vibration
- Radiation
**Case example no. 8**

**Emergency procedures**

The following list of roles and responsibilities for emergency procedures was developed by the OHS committee in a textile company. The enterprise-based communication skills teacher worked with supervisors and committee members trained to provide training in procedures for all work groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| General manager               | • Establish emergency procedures  
                                 | • Select emergency control organisation members  
                                 | • Update procedures as required  
                                 | • Train wardens  
                                 | • Conduct evacuation exercise at least annually |
| Emergency control organisation for each shift | • Conduct two minor practice exercises per year  
                                 | • Meet quarterly to train new members and review procedures |
| Chief warden                  | • In an emergency maintain check list  
                                 | • File quarterly ECO minutes  
                                 | • Coordinate emergency activities |
| Deputy chief warden           | • Deputise for chief warden if unavailable  
                                 | • Assist chief warden as required |
| Area wardens                  | • Be aware of disabled persons in the area  
                                 | • Determine nature of emergency  
                                 | • Notify switchboard etc.  
                                 | • Coordinate emergency activities  
                                 | • Communicate with chief warden  
                                 | • Carry out regular checks of fire and safety equipment  
                                 | • Know electrical switchboard and how areas can be isolated  
                                 | • Identify all hazardous materials and ensure they are kept properly  
                                 | • Ensure all personnel familiar with emergency procedures |
| Deputy wardens                | • Deputise for Area warden  
                                 | • Follow directions of warden |
| Communications officer        | • Ascertain nature and place of emergency  
                                 | • Notify appropriate ECO  
                                 | • Call emergency service  
                                 | • Transmit and record between chief warden and area wardens  
                                 | • Maintain emergency communications log |
| Immediate action team         | • Assist with firefighting  
                                 | • Disconnect electrical and gas services as required  
                                 | • Stand by with forklift |
Case example no. 9

Mapping safety features

In a laundry, the enterprise-based communication skills teacher developed a class exercise that required learners to create a map of the safety features of the plant, including:

- Safety signs
- Fire extinguishers
- Showers
- Protective clothing and equipment areas
- Emergency procedures
- First-aid posts
Case example no. 10

Induction program

An enterprise-based communication skills teacher in a textiles company developed the following worksheet to accompany a health and safety induction booklet:

Employee Health and Safety Booklet: Worksheet

Page 1

Learner Activity 1
Find where the nearest Health & Safety Manual (red plastic binder) is kept.

..............................................................................................................................

What number is on the front of it? ........................................................................................................................................

2

Discussion
• What is the difference between an 'incident' and an accident?
• Give examples of 'incidents' worth reporting.
• Give examples of accidents worth reporting.
• Give examples of potential hazards worth reporting.

Learner Activity 2
Using the Accident Investigation Report in the red manual, and working in a group, fill out a mock report for an accident or incident that may have occurred in the plant.

3

Learner Activity 3
Divide the 14 categories among participants and have a treasure hunt. People go out with the check list and look for any breaches (or good examples).

5

Learner Activity 4
Write down the name of the warden and deputy warden responsible for your area:

1 ...........................................................................................................................................................

2 ...........................................................................................................................................................

Is there any time when the factory is operating when they would not be available?

Yes........ No........

If yes, who would you contact in case of emergency?

..............................................................................................................................................................
6 **Learner Activity 5**
Locate your nearest emergency alarm:
- On map
- On floor

Find out when it was last checked .................................................................

Is it in good working order? ...........................................................................

How do you know? .........................................................................................

7 **Discussion**
What would you do if someone in your area:
- Fainted?
- Had a severe vomiting attack?
- Fell, hit their head and was unconscious?
- Seemed to be in great pain?

8 **Learner Activity 6**
Where is the nearest fire extinguisher to your work site?

How many different types of fire extinguishers can you locate in the factory?

What are they to be used for?

10 **Discussion**
What potential fire hazards exist in your area?

What flammable materials exist in your area?

11–12 Give your area a mark out of 10 for each of the fire prevention strategies listed.

17 **Discussion**
What could be the effects of medication that would require you to report it to your manager?
What type of medication might affect your work?
19 Who is your OHS rep?

Check if your OHS rep has a copy of the OHS manual: Yes... No.

Has your OHS rep attended OHS committee meetings during the past month? Yes... No.

20 Check your OHS risks by filling in relevant boxes.

Does your job involve a risk to your health and safety? Yes... No.

Do you need to be formally assessed? Yes... No.

21 If you are worried about health and safety in your workplace, who should you contact?

1

2

21 Discussion

Why is baggy, loose clothing dangerous?
In what areas that you go into is foot protection needed?
Where can you obtain protective gloves in this workplace?
What types of eye protection are available to employees? Where do you get it?

25 For office staff:

When was your electrical equipment last checked by maintenance?

Using the OHS manual, explain the difference between occupational overuse and repetitive strain injury.

27 Check your knowledge

How often should the safety check be carried out on a forklift?
Case example no. 11

Use of notice boards

In one workplace, the enterprise-based teacher had worked with the OHS committee to create a number of OHS notice boards. The format is shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OHS Committee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Group photo, including identification of those trained in first aid)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housekeeping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Results of housekeeping audits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Report all incidents in the register of injuries book in the supervisor’s office |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accidents and lost-time injuries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Bar graph showing frequency)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes of last OHS committee meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Any suggestions?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please fill out one of the sheets below and give it to any OHS committee member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General notices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(For example, competency check lists)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My idea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My idea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My idea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case example no. 12

Continuous improvement teams

A furniture company established continuous improvement teams to examine specific aspects of its production process that were having difficulty producing quality outputs.

Each team comprised workforce members and managers. In addition, each team had a member who was a health and safety representative or a member of the OHS committee.

The teams were charged with the task of identifying practices related directly to production that might be improved, and safety practices, hazard reduction and health threats.

The enterprise-based communication skills teacher worked with a number of the continuous improvement teams, and facilitated discussions and written communications between themselves and with the workforce.
Case example no. 13

Using SafetyMAP

Detailed materials for this comprehensive health and safety improvement program are available from the Victorian WorkCover Authority.

The system has 12 elements:
• Building and sustaining commitment
• Documenting strategy
• Design and contract review
• Document control
• Purchasing
• Working safely by system
• Monitoring standards
• Reporting and correcting deficiencies
• Managing movement and materials
• Collecting and using data
• Auditing management systems
• Developing skills and competencies

For each element, there are audit criteria to measure whether systems are working.

The elements are linked to the AS/NZS ISO 9001 quality management standard, and designed to integrate health and safety with quality management systems. Enterprises that have achieved or are seeking quality certification are likely to find this program easy to follow.
Appendix 1: Reading guide

A great deal of material has been published on health and safety in the workplace. The following list is a small selection of publications that may be useful to workplace-based communications teachers:

Australian Chamber of Manufactures, Plant Safety Programme


Serie, O. 1995, Writing for Safety, Workplace Skills Unit, Swinburne University of Technology.

Victorian WorkCover Authority, SafetyMAP.
Appendix 2:
Acknowledgments

A number of individuals and organisations contributed information, ideas and experience for this project. Particular appreciation goes to:

Ensign Services (Australia) Pty Ltd
Lynda Wyse & Associates
Melba Industries (Australia) Pty Ltd
Shaw-Idea Pty Ltd
Victorian Hide & Skin Producers Pty Ltd
Victorian WorkCover Authority