



A Guide to Developing Safety Culture

The ultimate toolkit for developing a safety culture

TABLE OF CONTENTS

-  **Introduction**
- 1 3 steps to developing a successful safety culture**
- 2 Traditional values in developing a safety culture**
- 3 Getting started is just the beginning**
- 4 8 Investments to bring a safety culture to life**
- 5 Fire safety in the workplace**

INTRODUCTION

Health and Safety has increasingly become a hot topic in countries across the globe as governments and business alike look grapple with the increased costs and loss of productivity that comes as the result of Health and Safety incidents nevermind the personal cost to those involved and wider mental health and stress implications. While it's all well and good increasing compliance through checklists, observation, reporting and penalising ultimately the goal has got to be about building up a robust safety culture with organisations.

Safety Culture is about people, specifically your people and team, and how they work together. There are two main things that are common to all definitions.

1. It is about people's values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. In an organisation with a good safety culture, these are geared towards safety which is considered a priority.
2. It is about the spread of these values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Organisations with a good safety culture have these spread throughout—from top management to the shop floor and in everything everyone does in the organisation.

“the core values, beliefs and behaviours resulting from a collective commitment by leaders and individuals throughout an organisation that appropriately prioritise safety against other organisational goals to allow business objectives to be undertaken without undue risk”

Why is it important?

A good safety culture helps an organisation maintain safe operations. By having everyone, from operators to managers, take safety seriously, remaining watchful and avoiding compromises, means that operations are conducted in as safe a manner as reasonable. This can significantly reduce the risks of accidents occurring.

By contrast, a poor safety culture means not everyone takes safety seriously, are not watchful, are complacent, and compromise too readily. This may mean that there are workers or operations that are at risk of having a higher number of incidents and accidents. In organisations with a poor safety culture, incidents, especially near misses, are not reported or acted upon adequately and instructions are not properly followed.

This is neither efficient nor effective in the long run. For example, if incidents are not reported and lessons learnt, they will continue to occur. This may result in an undue risk to workers and the public. Safety culture is therefore an important aspect to ensure safety is integrated into an organisation's operations.

Implementing and / or Improving Safety Culture

There are several important lessons that should be noted when trying to improve an organisation's safety culture. Firstly, many organisations try initially to assess their current safety culture (also referred to as safety climate). This is done through: surveys and questionnaires; selective interviews of staff; and watching staff generally. These methods give decision-makers a good overview of the organisation's safety culture. Another important lesson is that it can take time to improve an organisation's safety culture because people's attitudes and behaviours take time to change.

Lastly, making changes to safety culture usually starts with smaller changes at the local level. For example, having a good reporting system for incidents and events and ensuring these are acted upon in a just and fair manner goes a long way to improve the overall culture of the organisation. From these local changes larger wholesale changes to cultures emerge later on. Therefore, it is important to ensure that these building blocks of a safe culture are addressed first e.g. a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down approach.



CHAPTER ONE

3 steps to developing a successful safety culture

3 steps to developing a successful safety culture

What do crossing signals and Safety Culture have to do with each other?



Anyone having a casual walk around Wellington New Zealand in the early months of 2019 would have been far more likely to have kept to the rules in relation to crossing the road. Crossing roads in such a beautiful and fascinating city is often fraught with risk as pedestrians are distracted by all the city has to offer and tend to ignore the crossing signals.

But during the early months of 2019, there was something special that the council had installed that made people stop every time they came to a set of crossing lights. Rather than just cross against the lights, you could see people all over Wellington actively looking at the crossing signal and in fact pausing in expectation of the signal changing.

Why? Well, the clever folks at Wellington Council had reprogrammed the pedestrian crossing lights to reflect various city cultural icons. There was a Drag Queen popping up in Cuba Street, Kapa Haka made an appearance in various locations and in the streets around Parliament, the lights celebrated New Zealand Suffrage.

How does an amusing change to pedestrian crossing signals relate to a safety culture?

Well, what was a very clever city focussed attention grabber that was presumably developed to celebrate had the added benefit of driving public safety. And this is a wonderful example of how small, 'soft' things that can be done within organisations can positively influence or 'nudge' the development of an internal safety culture

Here are three 'soft' actions that every organisation can implement that will help move that organisation toward developing a positive safety culture and as a result, improve the chance of everyone in the organisation going home safely every day.

1. Do the unexpected

Let's look back at the crossing signals. No one expects to be delighted by traffic guidance and as a consequence, traffic guidance is often ignored with, on occasion, dire consequences. In some instances thought, traffic safety measures can bring a smile and as a result, greater compliance. You've only got to look at the work done in Denmark in 2006 to see how a lighter approach makes a significant difference.

And in New Zealand more recently, Woolworths central distribution centres took a very serious approach to changing the safety culture in the company, but it was certainly unexpected. The company was aware that there was a sense that "it won't happen to me" among the staff. So, they hired a makeup artist and using some of the staff created 'accidents' based on potential dangers. The resulting images were reproduced and used on the aisle ends of the multi-level stacks.

The result, a significant improvement in the awareness of potential dangers and a positive change in behavior all based around doing something unexpected.

2. 'Anoint' a Safety Champion

I think we can use the ecclesiastical reference in this context because while the concept of an internal safety champion is well understood, don't make the mistake of 'appointing' someone, particularly if this appointment falls under a 'make work' approach. You need to make sure that your safety champion is passionate about an internal safety culture, has the background that allows them to transcend petty issues and is prepared to communicate with a higher power to get the job done.

In short an enthusiast who wants the role, not a staff member who is told to do the role. A very important difference.

And once this person is anointed, make sure they get the resources and the access to the C Suite that they'll need to ensure that your organisation develops a great safety culture.

3. Reward the behavior you want to see.

All staff have a personal interest in safety (no one wants to hurt or be hurt), but everyone loves recognition and reward. Organisations can see significant improvements in their ROC with a strong safety culture so when you see a positive change in your bottom line, whether this is a financial or more holistic measure make sure there is some recognition of the improvement and ideally that the staff see a hard benefit. It doesn't always need to be financial (that would be nice) but a positive recognition of good behaviour needs to be in place and adhered to.

Think about 'Safety Employee of the Month', a mention in the newsletter, days off and gift baskets based around their homelife (remember that families are a huge influencer in safety behaviours). Ultimately though, rewarding positive safety behaviour with internal rewards such as bonuses, and promotions strongly reinforces the the internal safety message.

Of course, you shouldn't forget the importance of training as a tool to develop a strong safety culture. This is a crucial element that every organisation needs to implement and once implemented, allows for instant recognition of staff who complete the required training. This is especially true for organisations that have gone down the online training path. Instant certification means every successful completion gets recognised. And think about collecting recognition points inside the system and using those for additional rewards. Hey, why not get the staff to build the organisation's safety training themselves. An easy to use system with an embedded authoring tool would make this a breeze.

So talk about how these three things could be implemented in your organisation next time the planning team gather. You might be surprised at how easy it is to see positive change.

But remember, to understand the change. You need to have the tools in place to measure the change.



CHAPTER TWO

Traditional values in developing a safety culture

Traditional values in developing a safety culture

This is a great place for a subheader.

I was cycling through a wonderful waterfront area in the small New Zealand town of Oamaru the other day with some unexpectedly unallocated time on my hands. I was delighted to stumble across an incredibly well preserved Victorian commercial centre that was if not 'buzzing' then at the very least vibrant. Propping the bike against a thoughtfully designed stand I was able to consider the many providers of unusual merchandise that seems to define this particular area. From a bakery producing what was described as the world's 'best' mince and cheese pie (unfortunately a large recently consumed breakfast at the [previous night's lodgings](#) limited me from confirming this claim) through a wide array of SteamPunk 'merch' and an extraordinary number of books sellers, the array of goods on offer suggested that an earlier thought that my free time would drag inexorably might indeed have been incorrect were I to attempt an appropriate sampling of all the available delights.

So what has this to do with the 'Traditions of a Safety Culture'?

Well frankly, not a great deal other than as a reminder that reaching the same outcome can be achieved in a number of different ways and sometimes the old fashioned ways can be the best.

To illustrate my point, I had wandered into 'Slightly Foxed' (www.slightlyfoxed.co.nz) a small slightly dusty second hand book shop that, on entering, was like stepping back in time. The range of titles while not huge covered many of my interests and I was quickly able to spy a book that would be on few reading lists but seemed on the surface, appealing. I can assure the reader of this note that having glanced at a few pages of my newly purchased literary distraction while sitting on a waterfront bench regretting my decision not to have proffered some coin of the realm at the aforementioned bakery, "The Wooden 'O' - Shakespeare's Globe reborn" looks like a fine purchase indeed. Removing the book from its position on a high shelf and making my way to the book seller's perch, the Dickensian effect was even further enhanced. The owner, Kahren Thompson, was appropriately garbed in period costume and could easily have been taken for one Wilkins Micawber. Enthusiasm for his chosen life, fine penmanship and a wonderful attitude to profit made for a thoroughly enjoyable transaction. The chosen book was perused, the wisdom at this particular this purchase commented on, the details then entered, using a fine fountain pen, long hand in a journal large and and weighty enough to suggest that this merchant would generally be closer to "happiness" than "misery". There was no sign of plastic nor any other trendy virtue signalling packaging. The book was simply wrapped in brown paper and tied up with string. All very Mary P, extremely practical and thoroughly efficient sending this shopper on his way feeling thoroughly Victorianised (except for the bike shorts and t shirt constructed from a new space age anti moisture material, probably seaweed tendrils)

Slightly Foxed makes visiting Oamaru extremely worthwhile particularly if you are able to divert toward the nearby bakery (apparently)(and if it is that good, keep it to yourself).

Interestingly, a much larger "Collectibles" establishment around the corner (with a particularly enchanting range of Balinese fabric stamps) also supplied books and was run by a charming man with artistic leanings who was using an Apple 40 inch monitor and matching system to manage his business and provide the mood via, I think we can assume, Apple Music. Not a bad setup and very modern but the mood was broken when his internet call system kicked in and his very attentive grandchildren's voices were bouncing joyously across the objet d'art.

I wonder who had the better return custom?

So, literally doing things the old way provided a wonderful, cost efficient service that made me at least think about the opportunity to inject some traditionalism into how we at Intuto help customers develop a safety culture using our own, admittedly [high-tech training platform](#).

Three things sprang to mind.

1. Keep it real.

Developing a solid safety culture in any organisation needs to be a natural thing. What works for one organisation won't necessarily work for another. Whatever plans you put in place to improve the safety within your organisation, those plans need to meet the spirit of the organisation. Just like the book seller using the fountain pen and journal. That worked for him as a small operation in exactly the same way it had worked for organisations back when Charles John Dickens was writing. And if recording employee concerns using a quill matches your organisation's ethos then stick with it. If it ain't broke etc.

2. Keep it simple.

There are a multitude of health and safety tools on the market. These range from simple apps through to multi million dollar enterprise solutions. And these different tools exist because someone somewhere had a particular need that wasn't being filled by any other solution. At Intuto, our view is this; Start at the bottom and work up. These days all data is transferable, or at least it should be so, on that basis, start with a solution that suits what you do and how you operate today. If a handwritten journal works for your organisation then all power to you. As you grow or your needs change then you can take the next step and up your level of complexity but only when that makes sense and when it won't distract from your job at hand. I.e. Getting people home safely every day.

3. Keep it consistent

As Napoleon said over and over as he trudged dejectedly home after sampling the delights of a full on Russian winter, "If I hear that overture one more time I'm moving to the South Atlantic". All right, that might be both irrelevant and untrue but the underlying sentiment is accurate if slightly misplaced. The fact is that Napoleon was consistent in his goal of introducing liberal reform to the world and took to the road (with a few thousand men, horses and cannon) to ensure that the world he introduced it to was larger than just la belle France (and broadly overrun by smelly troops with more on their minds than who would play them in the movie) confirmed the generally accepted view that he was a nutter.

But he was consistent. Over and over he convinced the people of France, and more importantly those under his direct command, to listen, follow and if necessary, sacrifice themselves for the good of the Republic.

Now I'm not suggesting that every health and safety manager starts accumulating loyal, if slightly odorous, legions (it was a very hot campaign in that year and the cost of dry cleaning an 18th century infantry uniform...well...), but you should at the very least make sure your plan is solid and that you stick to it with clear ongoing communication. In short, be consistent, embed habits into your safety culture and before you know it, the Iberian peninsula will be yours! Or at least you will have a healthy, safe workplace.

And frankly who needs a whole peninsula?



CHAPTER THREE

Getting started is just the beginning

Getting started is just the beginning

At [Intuto](#), we get the chance to work with all sorts of businesses, from small bars in the centre of the North Island of New Zealand through to performing arts schools based in New Jersey USA. Not surprisingly, having decided to work with [Intuto](#), a cost effective online training platform, these businesses are all committed to improved staff performance. And let's be frank, while organisations all have the best intentions in the area of health and safety, looking to embed a really strong safety culture long term, ensuring that the organisation moves beyond intention to action and that the action carries on into the future, is one of the great challenges.

We are lucky enough to work with a wonderful company in the area of prevention of manual handling injuries. [Provention](#) has customers across a wide range of industries and works closely with these organisations teaching staff the principles of safe physical movement (physical intelligence), covering all aspects of manual handling. As the business leader, [Alison Richmond](#) recognises that for many people, their movement habits are unsafe, and this puts them at risk of strain and injury. Alison recognises that changing a habit takes more than just a one-off training session and this is much of the focus of Provention's work.

Provention take the approach that there are two distinct parts to any programme that will drive habit change.



provention.
INTELLIGENT MOVEMENT SAFER WORKPLACES

FIRST
move

Knowledge Acquisition

- What should I be doing?

Skill Mastery

- Keep doing it correctly to become a habit

Alison is clear that the first part of the habit change process is the easy bit. Embedding habit change is the challenging part. It's often this last part that is forgotten leaving the original intentions unsatisfied.

So what are some of the ways you can use to embed a long term positive change to an organisation's safety culture.

From researching a range of different training providers, the following standards seem to be generally accepted as key steps to embedding a positive health and safety culture and making sure it 'sticks' long term..

1. Set your health and safety goals and a plan to meet them

There is only one way to ensure that you achieve an organisationally wide safety culture truly embedded - Get Started

And there is no point in getting started unless you know what direction you are heading. It is of course teaching one to, as they say in British Commonwealth linked jurisdictions, suck eggs, but unless you are of the 'she'll be right' school of management, you'll already have a set of data that you can analyse to establish your risk points and from that you'll be very quickly able to set your organisation's Health and Safety Goals. Just make sure you do it.

2. Communicate your goals organisation clearly, and appropriately

Make sure your communication is relevant to your organisation. Don't just send out a note and expect everyone to jump on board. Think creatively. If there are a significant number of sports enthusiasts in the organisation, start a small tournament and reward both winners and those that warmed up and down correctly.

3. Walk the talk

If you are the manager of the organisation then you as the manager better be totally engaged in the health and safety culture. Modelling the behaviour you want from your team is the best way to bring your team on board. But remember you'll have to keep up your end of the programme to make sure your team keep up theirs.

4. Ensure health and safety is high on the list of company priorities

Talking about health and safety is a great start - ensuring everyone in the organisation is aware of the organisation's commitment to health and safety is the next key action.

There is no point adding health and safety as an agenda item if it is constantly moved down the list of organisation priorities. Get health and safety on the agenda and then get it out into the field.

5. Keep an open door

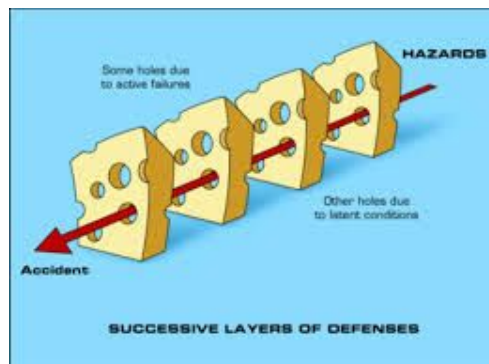
One of the greatest barriers to organisations adopting an active, positive health and safety culture is when members of the organisation feel discouraged from raising concerns about the way health and safety is treated within the organisation. One of the most powerful tools you have at your disposal is listening. And remember to assume that every issue raised by members of an organisation should be reviewed and if appropriate, acted on.

Remember that regardless of the actions that were or were not taken as a result of the issue being raised, make sure you go back to the person that raised them and explain what was done.

6. Collect all health and safety incident details, big or small.

In many ways, the smallest incidents are the most important because they can be the things that align and allow the bigger more damaging issues to occur. The 'Swiss Cheese' analogy is well known and absolutely relevant in this context.

There are many simple systems available that can help this happen. Make sure you look for tools that match the organisation's needs. There is no point in setting yourself up for failure by installing a system that is overly complicated. Having a system 'failure' because no one in the organisation had the expertise to manage your reporting system is the fastest way to see all the hard work invested at the start of the project wasted as the overall programme comes off the rails.



7. Keep your health and safety training up to date and followed up

It goes without saying that getting a strong health and safety culture in place requires the people in an organisation to know exactly what is required of them. In short, putting a well planned training programme in place up front. But you can't stop there. Modern training platforms like Intuto allow both the development of the training materials up front and the ability to make sure there is solid reinforcement over time. From a training perspective you should try and adhere to the following approach.

- Make sure your training materials are appropriate to your organisation
 - Buying materials 'off the shelf' might look like a sensible, cost efficient approach but these materials simply won't have the engagement that materials developed for your organisation with the full involvement of your organisation will.
 - Don't be put off by the thought that developing your own materials to run off your own platform is expensive. Look for newer, flexible systems that provide a SaaS approach and you'll be surprised and how little your investment needs to be.
- Make sure you track the progress and success of your organisation's members
 - Put in place a regular review of member activity. You can't fix what you don't measure.
 - Make sure this review is consistent over time, rewarding completion and chasing up those with poor progress.
- Set regular renewal periods for your training. Nothing changes habits like consistency and having consistency in training is a crucial part of any positive outcome.
 - Use your training platform to automate the renewal programme. A modern cost efficient platform takes the administration work away from your desk and lets you focus on the job of working directly with the organisation's team members.
 - Having the right tool is particularly important when the organisation is large and dispersed. The New Zealand Food and Grocery Council is a good example of how an organisation has implemented a standard health and safety induction programme across over 10,000 in store merchandisers who are required to repeat the training every 2 years. In this compliance is well over 95% and in store safety incidents have stayed consistently low over time.

Building a strong health and safety culture is not an overnight job. As Alison Richmond from Provention says;

"There is no one 'quick fix' for changing habits in any arena. Don't make the mistake of investing in a training programme and thinking you have ticked the box.

In the case of preventing strain-sprain injuries, the aim is to change individuals' movement habits and ensure they have safe ones.

This cannot be achieved by a one-off training programme and a few posters on the wall.

The ONLY way to change a movement habit (and by habit, I mean what people do unconsciously without having to think about it) is practice.

If you want to make a long-term change and get the ROI from your training programme – be committed to having systems in place that encourage people to practice safe movement habits."

And this approach is as appropriate to a complete health and safety culture as it is to improving manual handling.



CHAPTER FOUR

8 Investments to bring a safety culture to life

8 Investments to bring a safety culture to life

Tips for a safer workplace

There is a small cafe located in the heart of Toronto's Kensington Market, set up in a quaint home painted a blaze of turquoise that reminds me of the joy of eating out. Not only does [Fika](#) serve wonderful food and a superb elderflower rose water lemonade (I'm not a great coffee drinker) but it fills more than your hunger for sustenance. It fills your hunger for delight. It is quite simply worth the 'cost of admission'. Money well spent.

Now while it is easy to criticise the smashed avocado approach that many younger folk have adopted as not taking life seriously enough, recent readings about mindfulness suggest that time and money spent at places like Fika are appropriate investments. Enhancing a moment-by-moment awareness of your thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, through a gentle, nurturing lens as one is able to achieve when surrounded by old books and a great glass of lemonade is one way of helping you to have a clear mind as you reenter your office to confront the next of the day's challenges. And if that challenge is to do with Health and Safety and you are able to take on that challenge with an open mind and a fresh perspective then the investment in a 10 minute break in your favourite cafe is money well spent.

Let's look at eight other areas you can invest in to get the most out of your health and safety budget.

1. Invest in you.

As noted above, whether health and safety is your sole responsibility at your organisation or you have that responsibility as part of other day to day activities, you need to make sure you have the mindset, connections, experience and enthusiasm to make success of health and safety a core metric in your annual plan.

You are ultimately responsible for looking after your continuing education, joining professional associations related to health and safety and ensuring that you seek activities that inspire your enthusiasm. Be that a 10 minutes trip to Fika or a 5 day seminar at the Intercontinental in downtown Toronto! (take the bus, the parking is terrible but if you get the chance, go early and try the Westphalian ham and cheddar omelette - fabulous)

2. Invest in your organisation's training.

Every high performing organisation invests in staff development. Countless studies have shown that ensuring staff are on-boarded correctly and then supported consistently to improve their skills develops personal satisfaction and longevity of employment. Both of which drive overall performance. Just ask Former Harvard University President Derek Bok who once said, 'If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.'

This training can be face to face but all too often, day to day business gets in the way so if you haven't already, invest in an appropriate online learning platform like [Intuto](#). Tennis Canada have just started using it for training the hundreds of volunteers who help manage the [Rogers Cup](#). The Rogers cup is one of the most successfully run tournaments in the world so there must be something in this training thing.

And as part of your investment in staff training, don't forget to include core skills that employees can use at home as well as in the office.

- First aid training
- Time management
- General health and wellness.

Think about the whole person and the list writes itself.

3. Time

Businesses can demonstrate that they are serious about developing a safety culture by making sure that employees attending Health and Safety Committee meetings on site or off are not only encouraged to do this but have any costs covered by the business. Recognise that time itself has a cost and while costs such as travel, attendance and any overtime required may not be huge for a business they may be significant on an individual basis so be prepared to help out. And setting up opportunities for staff to get flu or appropriate screening programmes within the work day can provide real peace of mind for your employees and potentially be a lifesaver.

4. Provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

An obvious one but one that a surprising number of businesses neglect. If you want your staff to work in a truly safe manner, make sure they have the tools to let them do that. In particular, that their PPE is fit for purpose. Don't forget to ask your staff what PPE they think is needed. The answers may surprise you.

5. Trial Evacuations/civil disaster preparation

Big and small businesses know that preparing for the worst such as running trial evacuations or earthquake drills are a real cost to the business. As such, it is tempting to limited their frequency or not to do them at all. Don't allow this sort of thinking to take hold. If you as a manager are ever pressured to limit the disruption from this sort of preparedness, remind yourself and your team of the impact that might occur from losing a few minutes as a result of confusion in the event of a fire or other emergency. Not a pleasant thought.

6. Notice boards

This is such an obvious one - and inexpensive. A simple tool to that once you get staff used to looking for updates and interesting developments you may find that a central notice board can become a place to meet over a cup of coffee and talk about keeping every one in the business safe.

The humble notice board is low tech, low cost but potentially high impact and far too few businesses employ them effectively.

7. Healthy lifestyles

Investing in initiatives such as providing or subsidising gyms or swimming pool visits can generate a powerful return for the business with significant improvement in staff wellbeing. Linking to internal competitions based around employee driven goals can add a tremendous incentives to help staff make the most of it.

Back this up with regular onsite support for minor injuries by having a physio come to the business to help your team keep on top of their aches and sprains. Think about teaming up with other local businesses to maximise the effectiveness of this initiative and minimise the cost.

8. Ensuring the business is set up for health and safety success.

Typically, the management of a business have this as a core KPI, or at least you hope they do. Think about flipping this 'norm' on its head. Why not give the staff a budget to make sure that your workplace is as safe and healthy as possible.

You'll be investing a substantial sum in this area in any event. Why not set up an internal fund where the staff decide where that budget should be spent. This might be improved driver safe zones in the warehouse, new/better guards on potentially dangerous equipment or specific safety training. Giving 'ownership' of a dedicated budget to the staff moves 'ownership' of health and safety in the same direction. And apart from improvements in your underlying health and safety culture you might be surprised at the savings that come from this sort of initiative.

Summary

Investing is usually described or understood to be investing in assets to drive a financial return. Think about your overall safety culture as an investment in your greatest asset, your people. Asset development rather than an operational expense and the right thing to do.



CHAPTER FIVE

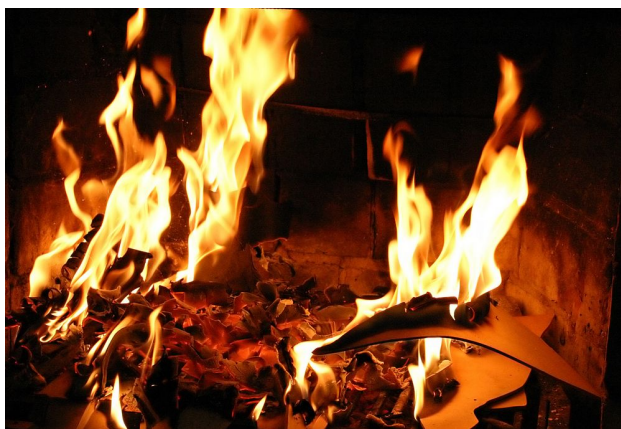
Fire safety in the workplace

Fire safety in the workplace

Preparation, Prevention, Management & Aftermath

Of the many potential health and safety hazards, perhaps the most terrifying to contemplate are fire related. In particular, for office workers without heavy machinery to manage, forklifts to dodge, heights to scale or holes to fall into it's easy for complacency to set in and the very real danger that fire can present can be ignored. Despite this fires are the most common cause of damage and death in any workplace.

Whether you're a business owner, landlord or employee it is in your best interest to ensure that your workplace is safe from fire related hazards. When developing an overall safety culture fire safety should be high on everyone's awareness. Matt Jones, Director from [Advanced Safety](#) believes that there are four stages of fire hazard management to consider: preparation, prevention, management, aftermath. Let's look at each in detail.



Preparation

Fire safety preparation starts with developing a business safety checklist. This should be as comprehensive as possible including everything from business continuity to essential office equipment. In particular consider the following:

- Insurance to cover loss of equipment, business continuity and loss of income.
- A plan for working offsite and ensuring you can still service your customers to the best of your ability.
- Adequately looking after your employees health and mental well being after a fire event.
- Necessary fire safety equipment suitable for the size and type of working environment and the potential fire hazards that exist. You'll need to think about fire extinguishers, fire blankets, hoses and of course smoke detectors and fire alarms.
- Exit signs and evacuation paths.
- Fire drill schedules and fire wardens.

Fire drills in particular are worth expanding on. In many jurisdictions annual or bi-annual fire drills are mandatory. But, let's face it, the alarm goes and there's usually a collective groan because it's come right in the middle of an email or phone call. People then scan around to pick up personal valuables; cell phones, wallets and if it's close to lunch, car keys. People then meander outside to wait for the call "clear" or escape to the nearest coffee shop. In the meantime, the poor sod who's been designated fire warden checks and clears meeting rooms, staff rooms and bathroom's hoping and praying they don't have any awkward encounters along the way.

Fire drills are a key preparation to keep you and your peers safe in the event of this type of disaster. They are designed to teach what to do and what not to do under controlled conditions so that should you have an unexpected event, people don't die needlessly. When people panic, they stampede. When stampedes occur people get crushed to death. People panic when they don't know what to do. People don't know what to do when they don't prepare for things.

After each drill, gather management and employees together to evaluate the effectiveness of the drill. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your plan and work to improve it. You should know of course whether your local fire codes and your insurance carrier require you to hold periodic fire drills but regardless, it's just good practice to ensure the safe evacuation of employees.

Fire Drill Objectives

Fire drill objectives include:

- Giving employees an opportunity to practice emergency procedures in a simulated but safe environment.
- Determining if employees understand and can carry out emergency duties.
- Evaluating effectiveness of evacuation procedures and determining necessary adjustments to procedures to improve performance.
- Complying with requirements of the local fire code.

These somewhat innocuous events are a good example of how developing a safety culture encompasses more than just checking-in with staff to see if there are any health and safety concerns.



Prevention

While it's essential to be prepared in case the worst occurs and you suffer a fire, ideally you'll never have one. While there are occasions where a fire may occur outside of your control, for example spreading from a neighbouring property, you want to do your best to prevent a fire in the first place.

Prevention starts with identifying potential fire hazards in the workplace. This will of course differ from business to business. Common hazards to consider include:

- Rubbish.
- Gas cylinders.
- Flammable liquids.
- Heavy electrical equipment such as switchboards. These can cause significant fire hazards when not stored at the correct temperature or exposed to moisture.
- Loose wiring or plugs. These can be a risk when coming into contact with water or other flammable liquids.
- Gas appliances that are in bad condition, leaking gas or are near other flammable objects such as chemical storage or other appliances. Make sure appliances are thoroughly inspected, maintained and positioned appropriately.

A specialist service offered by some electricians is Thermal Imaging. This can be useful in pinpointing any underlying electrical problem inside walls or a switchboard and will pick up problems that can be unseen by the naked eye. This is particularly useful in older buildings, but should be considered for any building as part of routine maintenance every 12-24 months.

Any hazardous substances kept on site must be separated from any possible ignition source. There are three types of ignition sources that must be considered:

- Flames, e.g. cooking equipment, welding flames, gas heaters and pilot lights.
- Sparks, e.g. starters for fluorescent lighting, electric motors, welding arcs, electrical equipment like power points, cigarette lighters, switches, telephones, static electricity, hot works.
- Heat, e.g. hot surfaces such as light bulbs, ovens, radiators or heaters, flue pipes, vehicle engines and exhaust systems, pumps and generators.

Of course it goes without saying that smoking in the workplace can be a significant risk if not contained in a safe zone away from areas of risk.



Fire Management

In the event that a fire starts on site understanding how best to manage the situation will ensure you and your colleagues are better able to deal with the emergency.

If a fire is spotted and an alarm hasn't been raised, the first thing to do is alert anyone in the vicinity. If the fire can't be quickly and easily be contained then you must call the fire service immediately and initiate your evacuation procedures. Typically you'll have 3 minutes to evacuate before a fire becomes unsurvivable. When in doubt, get out!

If there is smoke it will be hot and could be poisonous. Get on your hands and knees and crawl out fast.

Remember, get down, get low and get out!

If you can, close doors behind you to stop the fire spreading. If you can't get out of the room you're in, close the door and put a towel or cloth under it to stop smoke coming in.

Once you're outside of the building, stay out. Never go back inside. Follow the evacuation procedures you have learnt including letting the arriving firefighters know if anybody is unaccounted for.



In the Aftermath of a fire

It is extremely important to be just as aware and safety conscious after a fire has stopped burning.

If you've been involved in a serious fire, it's important you do not enter the damaged premises unless you have to and an emergency services official has told you it's safe to go back in. In this case, it is good practice to be accompanied by an official.

They will check the water, electricity and gas supplies and either arrange to have them disconnected or let you know what to do next.

Once the site is deemed safe to enter you should do so only if absolutely necessary to try to find important items such as your:

- Identification
- Insurance information for both premises and individuals
- Medication / information
- Eye glasses
- Hearing aids
- Wallet and valuables

A serious fire incident at your workplace may leave you injured, unemployed and in a difficult situation financially. Your personal insurance plan will therefore become very important if something bad does occur.

Wrapping up

Fire safety planning and preparation should be a cornerstone of any workplace's health and safety culture. Make sure you're prepared just in case the worst happens.

Book a FREE Consultation

To discuss your safety culture needs and learn how to get your workplace health and safety courses online for your staff, book a free consultation with one of our experts.

[Book a Consultation](#)