

## Are you behaving safely?

The behaviour of an employee as they carry out their daily tasks can often be the link that paves the way for many pre-existing factors to come together in a negative event, i.e. an accident. Through influencing behaviour, and



preventing the last link from occurring, behaviour-based safety management systems can reduce accidents.

Some examples of unsafe behaviours include: not holding the handrail when ascending/descending stairs, not putting equipment away after completing a job, not wearing adequate personal protective equipment etc., All of these behaviours are in the direct control of the person engaging in them, and therefore can be targeted for

improvement via a workforce driven behavioural safety initiative. It is a proven fact that the very act of observing and measuring people's safety activities alters their behaviour. (Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle)

The chief executive of the Health and Safety Authority has recently confirmed that safety is about "attitude and behaviour". Statistics from the work environment indicate that in 80-90% of all accidents, employee behaviour provides an important link. It is important to point out that it is not the same as human error, though the two are linked to some extent. Monitoring behaviour should also not be confused with inspections and audits of the workplace for unsafe conditions. The techniques used are based primarily on observation/intervention/feedback as a means to change behaviour.

In order for the 'behavioural safety' process to be successful in a practical sense the following guidelines should be considered:

### **1. Set up a project team:**

People should be asked to volunteer to either become observers or part of the project team for the behavioural safety initiative/process. These people should be trained to carry out their respective duties. The project team should identify unsafe behaviours that are placed on checklists provided to them or ideally developed by them.

With regard to the checklists, the main focus should be on the small proportion of unsafe behaviours that are responsible for the large proportion of your company's accidents/ incidents. e.g. poor housekeeping standards, not using mechanical aids provided, not reporting defects or safety concerns, not reporting near misses and not wearing PPE provided. Unsafe or safe behaviours identified in the company should be written onto a checklist of

some form. This should be divided into categories (e.g. Housekeeping, Use of Tools, Personal Protective Equipment, etc...). The checklists should be presented to employees for their approval or 'buy-in'.

## **2. Ensure significant workforce participation:**

Employees should feel involved in safety management, rather than leaving it solely in the control of managers. When safety is seen as been driven exclusively from the top down, the "us against them" attitude, employees will feel uninvolved and divorced from the process. Therefore they are more likely to engage in unsafe behaviour. In simple terms those most likely to be hurt should be actively engaged in eliminating the occurrences of unsafe behaviours.

How do I involve my employees?

- Nominate a Safety Representative among staff
- Ask the Safety Rep or nominated employees to participate in the project team or to become observers where they will take part in "safety workarounds" or observation 'tours' on a regular basis
- Having a "Safety Suggestion Box" in the canteen
- Employee Questionnaires
- Involving employees in the risk assessment of their own jobs
- Regular feedback to employees



## **3. Provide feedback to employees**

Feedback is the key ingredient of any improvement initiative. Those running the project should provide finely detailed feedback to those employees concerned so that they can either provide positive reinforcement to those working safely, or undertake corrective actions for those unsafe behaviours that persist.

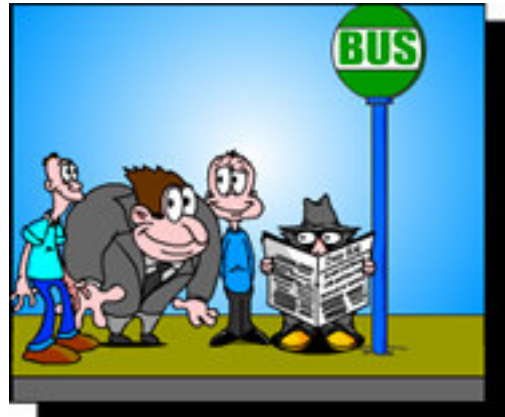
## **4. Implement and Monitor Results**

The observers should continue to monitor their colleague's safety behaviours on a regular basis so that improvements can be highlighted and praised or corrective actions can be taken. In this way behavioural safety systems incorporate the principles of continuous improvement.

## 5. Provide visible on-going support from managers and front-line supervision:

Management's visible and demonstrable commitment to the process is vital. They should demonstrate their commitment by:

- Allowing the observers the time to conduct their observation tours
- Giving praise and recognition to those working safely
- Providing the necessary resources and assistance for remedial actions to take place
- Helping to set up and run regular feedback sessions
- Generally, by promoting the initiative whenever and wherever the opportunity arises



The reason for the failure of a behavioural safety intervention is almost always due to a lack of management's commitment and support to the process.

### The Outcomes

The outcomes from a well planned and implemented behavioural safety system should lead to:

- Acceptance of the system by all concerned
- Improved levels of safety behaviours
- Increased reporting of defects, near misses, accidents, etc
- Lower numbers of accidents or incidents and property damage