

Why do we struggle to make the workplace safe ?

SLIDE 1

Run the Video - A bit of licence taken with the numbers . On average 6 may die a day as a result of a work injury, 1 person dies on average each day in Australian workplaces. The comments on progress are valid. We have made progress with workplace safety but no where near the progress of other areas.

SLIDE 2

So why is it we have not made great progress in reducing workplace injuries?

SLIDE 3

I want to use a fatality I was involved with a couple of years ago to illustrate what I think is holding us back from making real progress in workplace safety. EXPLAIN BRIEFLY THE TAURIMA FATALITY.

SLIDE 4

In summary, SWMS were signed off by all, as were Permits and Risk Assessments. Despite this, no listed controls were actually in place, there was no supervision of the task, and 6 blokes stood and watched the deceased stand under a suspended load and no-one said “ mate, can you just stand over there while we lift this pump”.

Now I can almost hear a number of you thinking... **SLIDE 5....its just common sense!!**

Well that may play a part but two thirds of those that die in Australian workplace accidents are over 40.

SLIDE 6

These are the stats on NZ workplace fatalities over the past 5 years and as you can see two thirds of workplace fatalities here were aged over 35, by which age you would expect there to be a level of common sense. we can't rely on common sense.

SLIDE 7

It is my view that there are three things holding us back from further improvement in workplace safety:

- We don't value the right things
- We have been hijacked by safety professionals, and
- we copy, copy, copy

SLIDE 8

In terms of what we value, we have become so obsessed with our system , procedures, documentation that when we talk about safety being our number one priority, we are talking about these procedures, documents etc. It is my view that we don't value our people enough. It is their safety and wellbeing that we should value. If we truly value our workers safety and concentrate our efforts on what will actually stop them from getting hurt, we wouldn't do some of the administrative crap we do, fill out meaningless bits of paper, waste hours of our time debating the consequence and /or likelihood of an incident while sitting in the lunch room!!!!

SLIDE 9

And one of the reasons for this obsession with paperwork, is that we have been hijacked by safety professionals. Now I am sure these people do want to improve safety, but they have flooded us with theoretical, complicated systems and forms that not only do little to improve safety but are almost impossible for most of us to understand.

The best example here is the risk assessment form. Coming in many forms, a JSA, Work Permit, etc. it takes a very simple process of identifying hazards and reducing the risks of harm from these hazards, and turns it into a task requiring a university degree to complete.

With any form or process, ask yourself , What is the purpose of this form or process? If you can't answer the question or the answer does nothing to improve safety don't do it or get rid of the form.

SLIDE 10

Professor Jim Joy works out of the University of QLD and has done a lot of work internationally on risk management with a number of mining companies. He says there are 5 things that will insure risk management fails in the workplace. READ AND EXPLAIN EACH OF THESE ON THE SLIDE.

SLIDE 11

The third thing holding us back is that we copy. Copying can be a positive thing but with safety we seem to just copy for the sake of it. Who makes their workers wear high viz clothing because everyone else does? When was the last time you looked at how effective the flashing light or little flag on the ute is in avoiding accidents? Who uses a JSA form because that's what large companies use ? Remember what I said about purpose. Make sure these things have a purpose for you and your workers If they don't look at other ways to reduce risks.

SLIDE 12

So now that I've told you what I think is holding us back let me share my views on what we need to do to get genuine improvement in workplace safety.

We need to talk to our workers, involve them in managing safety and engage with them regularly. They are the ones exposed to the risks and hazards so involve them in determining how to reduce the risks of injury and illness.

Part of good engagement is effective supervision. You need to ensure that workers, contractors and visitors are supervised. You need to help people identify hazards and ensure controls are put in place and are working.

This will involve physically checking or inspecting work, plant etc. You cannot manage effectively from the office or through checking bits of paper. There is no substitute for hands on supervision.

Make sure that everyone has the right plant, equipment and resources to do the job safely. Once again, ensure you physically check this, talk to your people. It is also important to ensure the plant and equipment is well maintained.

Ensure that all your workers, including you and your supervisors are adequately trained and competent for all of the tasks you give them. This is not only in operating plant and machinery but includes the softer things like safety procedures, first aid, using fire extinguishers etc., and for managers and supervisors, effective leadership, managing performance, time management etc.

SLIDE 12

It works for these guys and they don't need complicated systems, and copious quantities of paperwork to do it. Both The All Blacks and the Military ensure that all their people are well trained and competent, everything they do is supervised, they engage their people regularly, team talks, game plans etc., they have the best equipment for the job they are doing, and everything is checked and double checked. And if it works for them why wouldn't it work in improving safety in the workplace.

Thank you.