

Safety supervision

Creating an environment for effective supervision

This Guidance Note should be read in conjunction with the Guidance Note Safety supervision – Supervising workers with specialist knowledge or skills.

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Background

Safety supervision plays a key role in reducing injuries and fatalities associated with maintenance and non-production tasks. However, the work environment can impact on its effectiveness.

This guidance provides information for setting up your workplace to enable effective health and safety supervision. It is relevant to all industries.

The key to effective supervision

In order to effectively supervise workplace health and safety, the supervisor needs to be competent and trained to do so. They must also know how to manage workers and contractors, as well as workers with specialist knowledge.

This means decision makers need to provide direction, as well as adequate training.

Empowering supervisors

Supervisors need to be competent and trained to be effective in their role. Safety supervision needs to be delegated. Workers undertaking these roles need to:

- have authority to make decisions and act on OHS issues and know how to escalate these issues to ensure compliance
- understand OHS legislation, as well as workplace policies and procedures
- understand all requirements of the job and its obligations under OHS laws
- be aware of the workers' experience and skills, as well as the tasks being supervised, so they can understand what level of supervision is required.

Workers

Workers includes direct workers (full time, part time and casual), labour hire and independent contractors (and their own staff). You need to provide the same safe and healthy work environment for all workers in your workplace.

Specialist knowledge

To supervise workers with specialist knowledge, such as maintenance contractors, it is crucial to define what

is meant by supervision. Supervision is not necessarily telling someone what to do and how to do it.

Safety supervision is a legal obligation under occupational health and safety laws. It is supervision to ensure workers are following safety instruction and working safely.

Creating an environment for effective workplace supervision

Whatever their title in your organisations, those tasked with supervising safety play a crucial role in your workplace's safety culture. For example, a workplace with designated work groups, health and safety representatives and occupational health and safety committees allows workers to openly raise safety issues.

Three key areas that impact on effective supervision and workplace environment are:

- roles and responsibilities
- skills and knowledge
- workplace practices.

Roles and responsibilities

Having clearly defined roles and responsibilities means everyone knows what is expected and what they can contribute.

Employers, workers (including contractors) have clearly defined OHS roles and responsibilities. These can be defined in employment agreements and work contracts and included in performance management criteria. They can also be defined in workplace policies and procedures.

Supervisors have the authority to address OHS issues as they arise. Training is crucial to ensuring they can do this effectively.

Workers and contractors need to know who their supervisor is. Supervisors should:

- be readily available to workers and contractors
- be aware of the work done by the people they are supervising, as well as the OHS hazards associated with that work
- monitor specific activities (eg high risks tasks, task modifications, new workplace activities).

Guidance Note Safety supervision

Creating an environment for effective supervision

Supervisors also need to clearly define the tasks being performed in the workplace and if necessary, develop or provide procedure so work is performed in a safe manner.

Skills and knowledge

The employer has a duty to ensure skills and knowledge are to the standard required and up to date.

The employer shall ensure workers (including contractors) have the skills required to perform their roles and carry out tasks in a safe manner. This should include:

- workers (including supervisors) participating in training to address knowledge or skill gaps
- workers (including supervisors) participating in activities that can help them develop role experience (such as mentoring)
- supervisors attending regular refresher training.

When a task or process requires expertise that does not exist within the business, the decision-maker should engage people with relevant knowledge and/or skills.

This may include:

- seeking independent advice on OHS issues
- engaging qualified and competent contractors to perform tasks.

Employers should also verify all workers and contractors know how to complete assigned tasks in a safe manner.

This can be done by seeking:

- evidence of previous task experience
- certificates of competency or licences
- evidence of OHS compliance and evaluating OHS reports.

Work practices

Established policies and processes play a key role in ensuring your workplace has a balanced approach to health and safety in your work practices.

The employer should provide clear workplace policies and procedures for how work is to be performed.

Procedures should:

- be easily accessible
- ensure work is conducted in a safe manner
- specify machinery or equipment used to perform a task
- be explained to, and followed by, workers including contractors
- be supported through training
- be available in appropriate languages.

Hold regular OHS meetings with workers and contractors so they:

- are aware that OHS is a priority
- are informed about the progress of identified OHS issues
- can provide regular feedback on controls implemented.

Employers should provide clear policies and procedures on how workers including contractors should report OHS issues, including injuries, incidents and near misses, as well as hazards and risks. This includes procedures for documenting, and dealing with, non-compliance.

Employers can help supervisors monitor the work by developing checklists and checklist templates for potential OHS hazards, as well as having defined inspection schedules for monitoring tasks.

Employers should also have policies and procedures for engaging contractors. This should include processes for:

- defining the work to be outsourced and developing tender specifications
- evaluating tender submissions
- developing contracts and monitoring contracted works
- evaluating contracted works.

You might want to consider developing a 'preferred contractors list', based not only the successful completion of works, but also their OHS compliance.

Further information

Contact the WorkSafe Victoria Advisory Service on 1800 136 089 or go to worksafe.vic.gov.au

Related WorkSafe publications

Guidance Note – *Safety supervision, supervising workers with specialist knowledge or skills.*

Guidance Note – *Working on energised plant.*

Guidance Note – *Isolating plant.*

Guidance Note – *Contractor Management.*

Checklist – *Safety supervision, creating an environment for effective supervision.*

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