

Organisation

Communications on Safety



Communications are basically 'messages' which can be written, verbal or non-verbal. All messages need to be created, sent and then received. Human or technical problems at any of these stages may mean that the intended receiver of the message fails to take the right action. The quality of communications influences and reflects the company's safety culture.

Companies use many different types of communications for a variety of purposes, some examples are listed below. Important messages are often communicated in several ways to re-enforce and remind of the content.

General safety communications, e.g.: Notices, warning signs, posters, memos, gestures, hand signals, manager or supervisor leading structured safety talks in the workplace, observed compliance with safety rules (visible leadership);

Specific safety communications: to pass on and to receive information such as lessons learned; communication of actions taken after accidents, audits and risk assessments; responsibilities in job descriptions; safety signage and signals. Includes important safety instructions/training and emergency plans where confirmation of understanding is mandatory.

Safety meetings, the records of those meetings and how they are distributed.

Job-specific communications: examples include job briefings, 'toolbox talks' and written instructions or procedures with information focussed on job hazards and safety precautions needed. Discussions within teams and between teams (e.g. between team members working on the same job; between operations and maintenance teams, when handing over work from one shift to another). Job briefings before non-routine work is carried out, as part of the issue of safe work permits or confined space entry permits.

Informal communications: examples include general discussions and interactions between employees, supervisors and managers, where these include safety issues, discussions about life saving rules and behaviours, leadership behaviours, perceived attitudes of supervisors and leaders.

Emergency information: examples include gas or fire alarms, Public Address (PA) messages, team briefings, media statements.

Safety-critical Instructions: urgent instructions where it is essential that sender needs confirmation that action has been completed or is made aware of any issue. Examples includes communication with emergency services, communication between crane driver and banksman (see picture).

The success or effectiveness of any communication depends on whether the intended recipient undertakes the desired action.



Learning more about communications on safety.**If the answer to any of the questions below is 'no', then you need to take action**

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| 1. | Is the workforce actively involved in communications such as by dialogue and consultation rather than being just passive receivers of information? | ☐ |
| 2. | Are the communication channels by which people should raise safety concerns with management clearly understood, used, and is appropriate feedback received? | ☐ |
| 3. | Is there a defined structure for shift handover arrangements? | ☐ |
| 4. | Do employees and contractors know when and how they should report safety concerns? | ☐ |
| 5. | Do employees understand where they can obtain key safety information? | ☐ |
| 6. | Is the successful communication of key aspects of critical procedures assured? | ☐ |
| 7. | Is there a management system to communicate changes in practice and lessons following an incident? | ☐ |
| 8. | Is there evidence that changes to practices, as a result of an incident, are understood by affected employees and contractors? | ☐ |
| 9. | Has the company implemented ways to communicate relevant major hazard information to permanent and temporary employees, contractors, visitors and neighbours and to monitor the effectiveness of those communications? | ☐ |
| 10. | Have communication methods been considered in defining the leadership structure during emergencies and normal business? | ☐ |
| 11. | Is there a process to ensure that modifications, changes to processes, procedures, systems and organisation are communicated to all relevant employees and contractors? | ☐ |
| 12. | Can employees describe the safety implications relevant to their role, of any recent changes to the plant? | ☐ |
| 13. | Is there a process to review the communications routes following plant /organisational change? | ☐ |

What can go wrong?

Ineffective or unreliable communications can result from a variety of problems including:

- missing information;
- unnecessary information;
- inaccurate information;
- poor or variable quality of information;
- misunderstandings;
- translation errors, and
- failing to carry forward information over successive shifts.

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