Introduction to health and safety competence: understand

IOSH guides
This free Introduction to health and safety competence: understand is part of a series from IOSH aimed at workers, supervisors and managers (including senior managers) and links to the competency framework theme identified on the next page. The series provides general information on a range of important occupational safety and health (OSH) topics, helping the reader to understand better the role they can play in ensuring that OSH risks are well-managed.

Other titles in this Introduction series from IOSH can be downloaded from our resources page.

Readers who are IOSH members can access more in-depth information in a parallel set of guides, which include the principles underpinning various topics, with practical examples and case studies. These guides cover all competencies specified in IOSH's competency framework and can be downloaded from our members' resources page.

Join us
For a modest fee, non-members can join IOSH to gain access to all the information contained in these indispensable guides, as well as:

- industry recognition, by meeting standards of competence
- technical advice
- invaluable networking opportunities
- a voice in the global movement for change.

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The IOSH competency framework

The framework covers all the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed by occupational safety and health professionals. It has 69 competencies, divided into 12 areas which together make up three categories:

1. technical
2. core
3. behavioural.

These guides align with the framework with four levels:
1. understand
2. implement
3. lead
4. innovate.

Some guides are aligned to multiple levels. The levels indicate your career stage and your experience as an OSH professional.

Find out more about the competency framework here.

This guide aligns to the following technical competencies:
- health and safety competence: understand level.
Introduction to health and safety competence

What is health and safety competence?
Health and safety competence is being able to have individuals within the organisation who are competent to carry out their jobs and tasks, which enable the organisation to be health and safety competent.

Organisations need to understand what health and safety training is and provide this to their workers. Training is the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes to adequately perform a task or job and equally become competent. Specifically, health and safety training can improve safety knowledge and skills and improve problem-solving, analytical skills and enhance hazard awareness.

By providing training, not only does this fulfil these requirements, but it's also one part of the journey to achieving an health and safety competent organisation.

An health and safety professional’s role at this level is to assist in identifying which workers need to attend the training and what is required, whether it's information, instruction or formal training. If formal training is required, they must decide what the course covers and ensuring the learning outcomes are relevant to the needs of the worker and their tasks.
Development and maintenance of competency
Developing and maintaining competence in health and safety is critical to:

• keeping workers safe and healthy at work
• achieving good practice
• ensuring the efficiency and performance of the organisation.

Individual workers’ tasks may change over time as their jobs or tasks evolve and health and safety itself changes or develops.

Measuring competence in this area typically requires documentation of learning activities to ensure all individuals in the workplace are staying up to date.

Workers come to a role with some level of experience unless they are young workers or new to a role. That level of experience may need assessing and adding to, depending on what is specific to that business.

For example, a forklift truck driver may have experience of driving it in a warehouse, but this person is now working in a yard. For them to be competent in their new role, they might need training on the forklift truck used in this organisation and provided with additional training, instruction or information in order to understand the additional risks and control measures and to ensure they are competent.

An indicator of training effectiveness is through changes in the worker behaviour in terms of compliance with safety rules and procedures. This can be done via asking questions of workers and managers in the workplace or carrying out a survey.

Sharing learning with others
Workers can share success stories and examples of best practice with their colleagues. Workers can then be recognised by showing good examples of health and safety in the workplace and highlighting those examples of good practice.
IOSH is the Chartered body for health and safety professionals. With over 48,000 members in more than 130 countries, we’re the world’s largest professional health and safety organisation.

We set standards and support, develop and connect our members with resources, guidance, events and training. We’re the voice of the profession and campaign on issues that affect millions of working people.

IOSH was founded in 1945 and is a registered charity with international NGO status.