Occupational safety and health promotion and communication for distributed workers

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This document gives real-life examples of occupational safety and health leadership and management for distributed workers.

The purpose of this document is to provide employers and practitioners with real-world examples of what organisations have done to prevent, mitigate, manage and respond to occupational safety and health (OSH) risks and to provide health promotion for distributed workers. It aims to encourage and inspire others to take action to support and protect the safety and health of this group of workers.

Recommendation

In some cases, the risks or OSH needs involved were identified as a result of an incident or accident; in others, they were flagged up by the distributed workers themselves or emerged over time. In all cases, it is recommended that employers take a collective approach to decision-making and designing solutions, so that workers and other relevant stakeholders are involved in the development of solutions.

This section sets out three examples of organisations who have taken steps to promote health, wellbeing and safety so that work is seen, for example, as a positive aspect of health and wellbeing.

Areas of activity	Examples included
Occupational safety and health promotion for distributed workers – i.e. taking steps to promote health, wellbeing and safety so that work is seen, for example, as a positive aspect of health and wellbeing.	1 Toolbox talks for health promotion 2 Wellbeing events 3 Putting supervisors and management at the heart of OSH

Occupational safety and health promotion and communication for distributed workers

1   Toolbox talks for health promotion

The organisation runs two types of health and safety promotion:
- promotions relating to a new piece of equipment, or a new or upgraded standard – for example, the introduction of testing for dust masks.
- promotions aiming to make general improvements in day-to-day health and safety, as illustrated by the following two examples.
- summer promotion on sun cream, which involved talking to the workers about using sun cream, putting up posters in the facilities, sending emails out to the iPads saying 'don't forget your sunscreen'.
- winter promotion on safe driving, which highlighted the risks of driving on icy ground and went out as a toolbox talk.

Supervisors deliver toolbox talks individually to each person and they are also sent out via an email that workers can read at their leisure or in their lunchbreak. Everyone in the chain from worker to senior managers, and including the OSH practitioner, has to sign the toolbox talk to say it has been delivered to them and they have read and understood it. By getting individuals to sign in this way, the organisation can track who has and has not received the information and make sure everyone gets each toolbox talk.

The organisation also runs monthly meetings in the depots where all the distributed workers are asked to come in and managers talk about the business as a whole, how it is doing and what is happening in the world. These are designed to help workers feel a part of the organisation and also offer the opportunity to reiterate messages from toolbox talks. At the same time there would be campaign posters displayed. Managers are closely involved in promotions as they attend monthly meetings and are involved in making sure that the supervisors have delivered toolbox talks.

Toolbox talks will usually have photos attached to them and may sometimes include a video. The text for these talks is kept to a minimum to suit the audience: *"…we try and keep the visual aids up and the writing down…"*

Occupational safety and health promotion and communication for distributed workers

2   Wellbeing events

The occupational health team in this police organisation has so far run two wellbeing events, one in each of the counties it covers and over two days in each county. The events aimed to be accessible to all police officers so that they could come in and get their cholesterol and blood pressure checked, take part in a rowing competition against the Chief, receive information on preventing skin cancer and meet people from various charities (a testicular cancer charity, a breast cancer charity, the British Heart Foundation).

While there was no particular issue that prompted the organisation to run these events, the introduction of a fitness test for officers has put some strain on those who are not the most physically active. So the OSH team realised that it needed to put in some support mechanisms to help them with establishing a healthier lifestyle – and also to promote healthy lifestyles to the rest of the organisation, particularly those who are office-based and do a lot of sitting. The aim was to try and reach as many people in the organisation as possible, so the content was largely on common themes aimed at everybody.

The next step is to put in place mobile wellbeing events because the organisation has several locations around the counties it covers, many of which are some distance away. It is important to make sure that events don't just happen at the headquarters because people who are out in more distant locations, because of their shifts and duties can't get there. Even mobile events present challenges because of the nature of the organisation: workers are out and about doing patrols and operations so footfall through stations can be very low.

Another challenge is to motivate distributed workers to attend events. *"If I don't want to be helped, if I'm not interested in getting fit then actually I'm not going to come along potentially, it might not be a thing I want to do."*

The OSH team aims to be proactive in terms of going out to people rather than waiting for them to come in, otherwise there's a danger that services can become reactive, just answering the telephone and being there for advice. So one of the key things about the events was that they showed the workforce, and particularly the officers, the services available to them. The team aimed to publicise the events through verbal and other means (email, intranet, flyers,

Occupational safety and health promotion and communication for distributed workers

posters) to get workers to come and see what was on offer to them.

It was also important to get the senior people involved. One of the most senior officers came along and did a cycle race against a couple of the other officers. The events had senior management support from the start, but it is particularly valuable if senior people are present for photographs and so on to help publicise future events.

3 Putting supervisors and management at the heart of OSH

The organisation has introduced a plan to put supervisors and management at the heart of safety, including ensuring managers are on site and visible to the workforce, ensuring supervisors understand risk assessment is a critical part of their role and are trained to conduct and brief their workforce on risk assessments before work begins on any project and following a break in work. To support this, managers and supervisors were given training. There was a framework of accountability for senior managers, making sure their responsibilities for health and safety are fully understood, and a culture of taking proportionate measures when incidents do occur was established.

The organisation has been rolling the plan out in a number of different ways: communicating to the entire workforce through presentations, through posters and through email cascades. To help with roll-out of the action plan, each business unit leadership team is sponsoring an action point. The aim is also to learn and pick up ideas from operating units to see how they are doing it and ensure collective sharing of learning.

The ongoing activity now is to keep the plan current, and driven from the top of the organisation. The aim is to make it part of people's vocabulary, so that it is not seen as a bolt-on but as part of the organisation's language.