

SAFETY MANAGEMENT

Consultation

NT WorkSafe information bulletin series 18 Consultation provides guidance for employers and workers on consultation duties under the Workplace *Health and Safety Act 2007*. More information can be found in Sections 29 to 32 of the Act. This bulletin gives some brief tips on how this can be achieved by the successful implementation of an effective Occupational Health and Safety Management System (OHSMS).

Objects of the act in relation to consultation and worker representation

Part 4 of the Act is intended to ensure that relevant information about occupational health and safety is shared between employers and workers and that workers are given the opportunity to express their views on, and to contribute to, the resolution of occupational health and safety issues at their workplace. The views of workers must be valued and taken into account by the employer.

Section 30 of the Act describes the employer's duty to consult, and Section 32 outlines the duty of workers in regard to consultation.

Legislation

The emphasis under our legislation is for consultation between employers, workers and their health and safety representatives on OHS issues.

What is meant by consultation

Consultation is the effective communication between two or more people. In terms of health and safety we are mainly referring to the interaction between management and workers. Two-way communication is not just about talking, it is also about listening to the other person's point of view.

Why consult

The participation of employees and their input to the health and safety decision-making process is fundamental to the successful implementation and sustainability of an effective Occupational Health and Safety Management System (OHSMS). Management that actively promotes and encourages two-way communication in relation to health and safety is able to utilise the ideas, expertise and solutions of all staff.

Management commitment and worker involvement go hand-in-hand, with management providing resources for making things happen and motivating workers. In an effective program, management should regard worker health and safety as a fundamental value of the organisation. Worker involvement provides the means through which workers develop and/or express their own commitment to health and safety. Everyone in the organisation should be aware of their responsibility for themselves and their fellow workers. They should also participate in the establishment and ongoing maintenance of the OHSMS.

Ways of consulting

One on one - Make safety an issue in your workplace. Managers and supervisors need to be seen to set a good example, to walk around the workplace, to talk to workers and listen to safety concerns. Most importantly they must take appropriate action when concerns are raised.

Toolbox meetings – Whether you show a safety video, get everyone together for a brief explanation on how to use a new piece of equipment or just discuss safety issues, short informal meetings are an effective way of exchanging information, particularly in small businesses.

Management meetings – Because health and safety starts with management, health and safety issues should be on the agenda of the organisation's regular meetings. Responsibilities for health and safety need to be reported on at these meetings.

Shift meetings – Brief hand over meetings dealing with safety issues, changes to the work environment etc provide an opportunity to consult and ensure a carry over of information from one shift to the next.

Education and training - On and off the job courses, supervisor training and employee induction programs all provide opportunities to communicate about health and safety issues.

Safety Committees and Health and Safety Representatives – A good way to facilitate effective consultation in the workplace is by establishing a safety committee and / or supporting the appointment of an HSR. This is a more formal approach but is recognised as a good starting point for improving health and safety.

When to consult

Workers should be consulted on:

- When risks to health and safety arising from work are assessed or when the assessment of those risks is reviewed; and
- when decisions are made about the measures to be taken to eliminate or control those risks; and
- when introducing or altering the procedures for monitoring those risks (including health surveillance procedures); and
- when decisions are made about the adequacy of facilities for the health or safety of workers; and when changes that may affect occupational health or safety are proposed to the workplace, workplace infrastructure or equipment, substances used in the course of work, or the systems or methods of work; and
- when decisions are made about the procedures for consultation; and
- in any other case prescribed by regulation.

There should be documented procedures agreed to by workers for employee involvement and consultation on OHS issues. Information regarding OHS should be made available to all workers and others who may be affected. Those workers representing fellow employees (e.g. safety committee members or HSRs) should receive appropriate training to undertake their duties effectively.

For further information please contact NT Worksafe on 1800 019 115 or go to worksafe.nt.gov.au