

Working safely

The 'safe behaviour process'

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The following icons are used to help you find your way around this tool:



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Theory



Facilitator notes



Personal actions



Group tasks



Other resources



1.0

Introduction

1.1 Aim of this booklet

In a hazardous world, one of the best ways to ensure safety is to act in a sensible way when around hazards. The organisation has to provide a safe place to work; that is why a health, safety and environment (HS&E) management system is required. However, not all hazards can be removed or controlled by systems. People working close to hazards must be on their guard, for themselves and for their workmates. This means that they have to take care and act safely at all times.

The exercises in this booklet help people identify the hazards they might meet at work, and make it easier to change their behaviour. Members of the workforce and their front line supervisors must act in ways appropriate to the risks they face. By looking after themselves, and looking out for their workmates, they can reduce errors and avoid taking dangerous shortcuts to get the job done. This has to be supported by management, who are responsible for creating the conditions in which safe behaviour is possible.

In order for someone to work safely the main steps are necessary:

- **Sense** the hazard – can you even see/hear it?
- **Know** the hazard – do you understand how dangerous it is?
- **Plan** your response – what are you going to do about it?
- **Act** in the best way – will you actually do the right thing?

In addition, you also need to **Maintain** this way of working and be prepared to give and receive feedback to make working safely a habit – **Look, Speak and Listen**. This is shown in the safe behaviour process (figure 1).

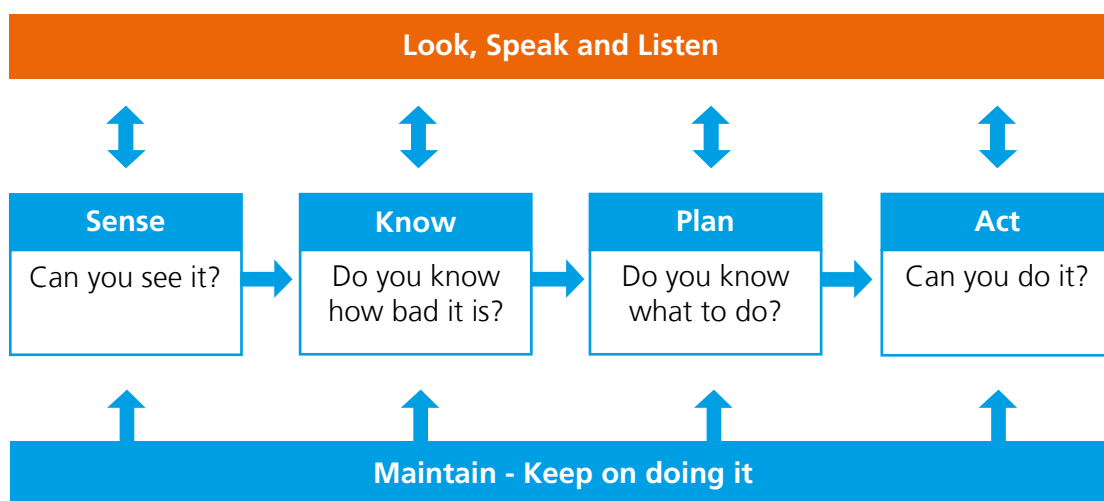
You may already use tools that support one or more of the steps in the safe behaviour process. **Section 2** will help you understand how to improve those tools using the exercises in this booklet. Once you have identified which steps of safe behaviour need addressing, you can use the relevant exercises to do this.



This booklet provides a structure for understanding some of the causes of unsafe behaviour and addressing them.

- It explains how and why people fail to act properly around hazards.
- It contains tools that can be run either in formal workshops, or preferably more informally as part of day-to-day activities in meetings or toolbox talks.
- It helps change the attitudes of people who actively take part in the exercises.
- It gives guidelines for managers on how to set clear expectations and improve their safety reporting system.

Figure 1: The safe behaviour process



1.2 Sense

If people cannot even recognise a hazard, then they will not do anything about it. The picture above seems like a typical situation - but it 'looks' quite different once you know that this was a workforce in 1989 recruited locally, inserting explosives into the ground after a short training period. Many hazards are like this and the inexperienced, such as short-term contractors, may not even know what they are looking at. It is not just vision, many of our hazards can be perceived with other senses. Hearing is equally vital, for example, if we want to avoid being run over by a vehicle coming from behind. The sense of smell tells us that there are dangerous gasses in the atmosphere. Feeling unusual vibrations may provide useful warnings if we realise what we are sensing. It is only once someone can recognise a hazard that they can manage it. Often this essential step is not given sufficient consideration, and people's ability to

work safely is immediately compromised. Therefore it is a good idea to check that everyone exposed to a hazard can actually recognise it for what it is. There may also be hazards and at-risk situations that cannot be immediately sensed. These invisible hazards could be a tired or stressed crew member, an inexperienced contractor, or a supervisor in a hurry. Other hazards which are hard to spot are contractual pressure, noxious gas or someone taking a short cut.



1.3 Know

Even if someone can sense a hazard, this doesn't mean they always know how dangerous it can be. It is vital to understand hazards in the workplace – the crucial step of not just looking at, but actually *recognising* a potential danger. People can become complacent about the hazards they experience or just become blind to them. Success at not being hurt comforts people into a false sense of security to hazards they can recognise but feel they can personally control. If we want to prevent all accidents and avoid being hurt we need to be more attentive and need to understand *all* the important hazards.

Knowing about our hazards makes us respect them; thinking seriously about the potential consequences and how they could affect us makes us more likely to want to behave differently around that hazard.

For example, did you know that falling coconuts injure or kill more people holidaying on tropical islands than their combined holiday air and road travel? Once you know this you will never look at a palm tree in the same way again! This is because spending time thinking about hazards and how they can affect you personally takes up 'brain space' and adjusts how you approach the hazard in future.



1.4 Plan

Knowing that what you are looking at is dangerous is a start, but not enough. The question to ask yourself is: what do I do about it? The obvious solution is to 'be careful', but taking care is a skill we have to learn – simply 'being careful' is not good enough. People need to be competent to know how to deal with the hazard and ask questions like:

- Can we avoid the hazard altogether?
- Can we protect ourselves by containing the problem?
- Should we tell others or can we remove the problem?
- Can we warn others before they are at risk?

Use the hierarchy of controls (Figure 2) to help plan ways to reduce or eliminate the risk.

Our personal skills give us a mental toolbox of possible solutions; we need to make sure we consistently choose the safest response to the hazards we recognise. For example, when working with electrically live equipment it is possible to survive by being extremely careful, but switching the equipment off and isolating the area where we want to work is the only sensible choice.



1.5 Act

Once you have chosen the most effective action the next question is: will I do it? The first step is to create situations where it is easy to perform a behaviour and hard to avoid doing the right thing. For example: people put their contact lens equipment next to their toothbrushes as a reminder to take them out before bed; cars can be made impossible to start if already in gear; checklists spoken out loud make it easier for everyone to remember; interventions that use certain words prime people for the conversation.

It is vital to understand what gets in the way of our good intentions; these may be organisational factors or purely individual issues. Having open discussion about the things that prevent us from working safely (both from supervisors to their workforce and from workers to their managers) is essential for improvement.



1.6 Maintain

One of the toughest behavioural challenges is helping people turn safe behaviour from a one-off act into a habit. We form habits all the time, such as where we put things after we have used them so we can find them again. It is, however, hard to keep up new behaviours when they are replacing old habits. For example, every time you drive a different make of car, you may find yourself using the windscreen wipers when you want to flash the lights. Picking up a habit is natural and easy, if nothing gets in the way, so setting up a programme to maintain good habits means making them easy to acquire and removing old habits.



1.7 Look, Speak and Listen

No one manages to work safely all the time. Even if people have the best intentions they can still commit unsafe acts, because we are all prone to errors. Sometimes we only realize what we have done once it is too late, *unless it is pointed out to us whilst we are doing it*.

We need to look out for our colleagues and have the skills and courage to intervene with them when we see an unsafe act. Both giving and receiving feedback are skills that can be developed, particularly as we already know how we like people to approach us and how we like to be listened to. The trick is to think about how others would receive what you are about to say or do.

Working safely

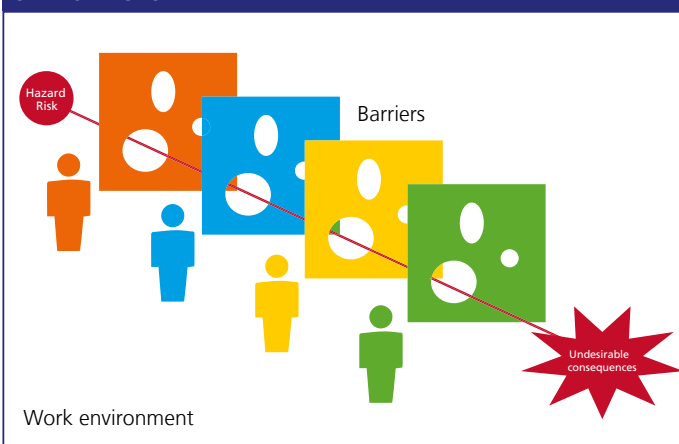
Incidents happen for all sorts of reasons. Many of the causes will have been around for a long time, but circumstances may suddenly make them particularly hazardous. Barriers placed between the hazards and the undesirable outcomes can become less effective (See figure below). Sometimes it is possible to rely on 'hard' defences, but one of the most crucial barriers still involves people behaving in safe ways. Often the assumption is that hazardous conditions can be controlled as long as people do what they should do, and incidents arise only when this is not the case. Unfortunately people, often the victims themselves, do not always realise just how important their own behaviour is and feel they have good reasons for their actions.

People form one of the defences against the hazards of the workplace. They usually form the final barrier, vital if all the previous barriers, such as design and maintenance, fail. To function effectively, however, they have to be able to recognise conditions dangerous to themselves or to others, and to warn other people who are in danger or are behaving in ways that may have serious outcomes.

People can fail to behave safely for a wide variety of reasons. They may totally fail to recognise a hazard; some road accidents are labelled 'looked but did not see'. But even if they can perceive hazards, they may still fail to understand their significance; hazards can be seriously underestimated, possibly because they have never led to injuries before in someone's personal experience. Knowing that one is faced with a real hazard can still cause problems if people don't know what to do; simply walking round a hazardous situation may be safe enough for one person, but reacting to it by making it safe and telling a supervisor may help save many. Finally, people may have all sorts of problems with actually doing what they know all too well they should do, such as telling a workmate to behave safely even when they may feel that 'it is none of their business'; although the health and safety of one's colleagues is always everyone's business at work.

The processes defined in this booklet support each of the steps necessary for safe behaviour. They provide a structure to get the most out of existing tools, but can be used stand-alone. They train people to recognise hazards and hazardous situations; they give people a toolkit of possible actions for dealing with hazards; they provide ways to carry out the necessary actions and also support colleagues in working safely together.

The Swiss Cheese model of accident causation in the work environment



What makes *Working safely* different?

- This approach is based on analysing how to encourage safe behaviour, rather than concentrating on stopping unsafe behaviour. It gives an overall structure to help understand what specific tools are doing.
- The psychological theory used to explain and change behaviour is well founded including Daniel Kahneman's Nobel Prize winning work on risk and decision making.
- Lessons from many other systems have been integrated into one unified process:
 - Every system has its good points, these experiences must not be lost, but they usually focus on only one step, not the whole process.
 - Current activities should be incorporated into the process, there is no need to stop existing programmes.
- The different levels of HSE culture are taken into account:
 - People can use the *Working safely* program in ways that suit them, based on what they can realistically be expected to do at their level of HS&E culture
- The approach is designed for your working environment:
 - It involves people doing what they consider achievable and setting up situations so that they will actually achieve what they set out to do.

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Rev 02
August 2016