

What is a toolbox talk?

A toolbox talk is a formal or informal meeting you have with your employees to communicate and exchange safety and operational information. It is also an opportunity for you to hear the views and insights of your employees. These meetings are generally short in duration and conducted prior to the start of a job or work shift.

The matters you discuss should be relevant and topical. In particular, you can discuss hazards and risks associated with your transport activities, run through any recent safety incidents, as well as current safety related tasks and actions. You certainly don't have to be a professional speaker to stand up in front of your group or peers, but it's important that you prepare in advance and are familiar with the topics you're going to talk about.

Why conduct toolbox talks?

Toolbox talks are one of the easiest and most effective ways to communicate with your employees and to keep them informed of important safety and operational matters.

How to run a toolbox talk?

When running a toolbox talk, you should consider allowing a specific amount of time, making sure you allow enough time to get through all the topics on your list and for your employees to provide input. Remember that you're trying to encourage two-way communication as it helps to get the message across. While you don't want to cut short useful discussions, you might need to talk to individuals outside of the toolbox talk to deal with specific issues.

Prepare in advance

Make sure you've considered everything you want to discuss. Take the time to familiarise yourself with your topics, so you're able to talk about them confidently and answer questions. To keep on track, you may wish to prepare some notes. Being familiar with your topics also means that you can encourage and lead discussions during and after the toolbox talk. Also be prepared to discuss the current status of issues and items raised at previous toolbox talks.

Don't leave anyone out

When conducting a toolbox talk, it's important to consider including your contractors, subcontractors and any other relevant third parties. To check you've included everyone, use an attendance form, which everyone at the toolbox talk should sign. For those who are absent, make sure you catch up with them when they return to work or, if a matter discussed at the toolbox talk is urgent, phone or email them.

Consider the topics

Choose topics that are relevant and related to safety in your workplace. It's important to remind employees that safety is a priority in your business and you want them to work safely at all times.

Below are some examples of topics that could be discussed:

- incidents and hazards that have been reported and the actions taken to prevent a recurrence or eliminate or minimise them
- lessons learned, safety alerts and changes to procedures
- fire and evacuation procedures
- personal protective equipment
- new tools and equipment
- your upcoming work schedule and any safety reminders
- related to the tasks involved.

Consider the format

Welcome everyone to the toolbox talk and start on a positive note. Remind them you're keen to receive their feedback and input but will try to keep the toolbox talk to the allocated time. You don't have to be the only one doing the talking. Encourage others to share in running the talk, as well as discussing relevant topics for their work area. Make sure you agree this with them in advance so they don't feel put on the spot. It is important to document the topics you discussed, any follow up actions and feedback provided to attendees. Also ensure that you maintain records of those in attendance.

Tips for communicating effectively

People lose interest very quickly when you're just reading to them. If you do have to read something, keep it short and practise beforehand so you can look up every now and again to ensure you still have the attention of your audience. While you are only allowing a relatively short amount of time, it's important not to rush, as you may come across as disinterested or impatient.

- Ask for any comments, feedback or suggestions on the current topic before moving to the next. Remember some people may be reluctant to have their say in a group setting and may wish to talk to you afterwards.
- Use visual aids or handouts if appropriate.
- Research the information, plan the delivery and don't try to 'wing it'!

On the NHVR website there is a template for toolbox talks. You can change the template to suit your requirements.