

Purpose of this guide

This guide will help you promote your safety messages and communicate effectively with your employees, contractors, subcontractors and other involved third parties.

Safety promotion

What is safety promotion?

Safety promotion is the process used to communicate, develop and sustain safety in your business. It helps your business improve safety performance by communicating lessons learned, broader safety information, and the distribution of Safety Management System (SMS) principles and associated procedures. It sets the tone for both business and individual behaviour, and supports the business's policies, procedures and processes, providing a focus on safety efforts.

When safety promotion is combined with safety risk management and safety assurance, it provides the means for a business to manage its safety risks.

Safety promotion can be the difference between having an effective SMS and having an SMS that just sits on a shelf. It can set the tone for your SMS and encourage the development of a strong safety culture.

Why promote safety?

Supporting and promoting safety in your business clearly establishes management's commitment to your SMS. In addition, ongoing safety promotion activities demonstrate to internal and external parties how seriously your business considers safety. Having safety at the forefront, and constantly spreading the message about safety initiatives, lessons learned, good news stories and safety issues, helps develop a culture where safety comes first when any task is carried out and when anything new happens.

When promoting safety, you may need to promote a change of mindset or attitude and explore safer alternatives. It can be difficult to promote safety if employees already have a negative attitude towards safety. It's important to demonstrate that safety is much more than a hard hat or pair of safety glasses—it's a mindset.

Keeping the information current and relevant when promoting safety is just as important as promoting safety itself.

How can you promote safety?

Safety can be promoted through lessons learned, safety information, safety procedures and key safety messages from the leaders in the business.

Promoting safety can be achieved by:

- conducting thorough risk assessments and involving everyone in the process
- encouraging employees and third parties to report any safety concerns
- responding in a timely way to safety concerns, hazards, risks and any incidents
- thoroughly investigating incidents and near misses, and communicating lessons learned
- making safety a primary focus in inductions
- developing and encouraging safety leaders in your business
- promoting and attending safety meetings and safety training sessions.

Leaders can support safety promotion in the business by:

- making themselves available (e.g. having an open door policy)
- demonstrating a commitment to safety and leading by example
- being consistent and responding and acting promptly to safety issues
- being involved in new employee inductions, training and safety activities
- promoting good news stories and lessons learned.

Safety communication

What is safety communication?

Safety communication is the exchange of safety information through spoken, written and other means. It is one of the most effective tools to support your SMS.

Why is safety communication important?

Safety communication is important because it raises safety awareness and understanding. It keeps everyone informed and involved, and makes sure they know what's going on with safety in your business.

Communicating and giving timely feedback will also encourage your employees to continue to report hazards and incidents. It may also help overcome any reluctance to get involved in safety activities and participate in training.

How can you communicate safety?

For communication to be effective, it needs to be two-way, open and free-flowing. It's important to encourage everyone to ask questions or make suggestions or comments. Keep your communication positive and bear in mind that some people may need more explanation than others before they properly understand the message.

Meetings and discussions should encourage:

- employees to share safety suggestions, issues and ideas
- openness, respect and trust
- support from experienced workers to newer workers.

As a minimum, your safety communication should:

- ensure employees, contractors, subcontractors and other involved third parties are fully aware of your SMS and its processes
- convey safety-critical information
- explain why particular actions are taken
- explain why safety procedures are being introduced or changed
- give timely feedback to those who complete safety reports.

Safety can be communicated through various means, including:

- safety briefings
- toolbox talks
- training events
- posters
- newsletters
- safety alerts
- safety bulletins
- noticeboards
- presentations
- workshops
- initial and refresher training
- safety policies and procedures.

Sources of safety communication can include:

- general information relating to safety in the workplace
- changes in equipment and work processes
- identified hazards
- incidents and near misses
- lessons learned through incident reporting
- outcomes of internal safety investigations
- observations from safety audits and workplace inspections
- outcomes of safety culture surveys.

Communication tips

- Show enthusiasm and deliver a clear and consistent message.
- Use short, straightforward, simple words and phrases—avoid slang words and jargon.
- Deliver positive messages (e.g. instead of saying “accidents happen” you could say “accidents are preventable”).
- Don’t be afraid of using dramatic messages to ensure you get the message across.
- Wherever possible, use examples or case studies with pictures or diagrams.
- Actively listening sends a signal to the other person that you appreciate what they have to say.
- Consider your tone of voice and body language.
- Remember, there are no dumb questions. Each deserves a considered response.

- Don’t rush, as you may come across as impatient or as though you need to be somewhere else.
- Encourage open communication and give everyone the chance to have a say.

Safety communication in your business

Consider the items in the checklist below and whether they could help you ascertain whether your safety communication is effective.

- Is safety information shared fully, accurately and in a timely manner?
- Is safety actively and routinely communicated through newsletters, briefings, toolbox talks, posters etc.?
- Is face-to-face communication practised whenever possible?
- Is sufficient time allocated for safety communication?
- Is two-way communication encouraged?
- Is confirmation sought to ensure the safety message has been understood?
- Do you continually raise awareness of hazards and risks in the workplace?
- Are lessons learned from incidents and near misses discussed with employees?
- Is feedback considered, where relevant, in a process of continuous improvement?

Other safety communication considerations

It’s important to remember that English may not be everyone’s first language, and that some people may have difficulty understanding due to disability or learning issues. It’s not always easy to identify these difficulties, but the more open and honest you are with your employees, the more likely they’ll be to share them with you. You may need to:

- provide language and interpreter services
- provide written material in relevant languages
- use bilingual facilitators
- use pictures and videos wherever possible
- verify understanding from training and instruction.

On the NHVR website there is a template for safety briefings and toolbox meetings. You can change the template to suit your requirements.