



PeopleRight

Human Resources Solutions

Quick Points:

- Adopt a focused and comprehensive approach
- Sell your plan with a business case model
- Focus your effort on a clearly high need area
- Use the 3 pronged approach to implement your change



"... caution that on its own, training may not reduce accidents ..."

Investment in OHS Initiatives Pays Dividends

Often we come across employers who have limited OHS (Occupational Health & Safety) budgets and struggle to get the resources to make real health and safety improvements. Many simply spend what little they have on whatever issue emerges as the squeaky wheel. Perhaps a vocal Joint Health & Safety Committee (JHSC) member is lobbying to go to a conference or training for more members. Sometimes the money is spent in some frantic effort to meet a new regulatory requirement. While we don't advocate less training or ignoring JHSC advice, we strongly recommend employers consider another approach.

One wonders how some companies seem to do so well in Accident Prevention while others continue to struggle with higher than average accident rates. Is the secret that they spend millions on OHS? Our experience with companies that do enjoy such success is that it is less a matter of *how much* they invest in OHS but more on the *focused and comprehensive approach* they take, coupled with a persuasive business case approach.

The answer to almost any business challenge is hardly ever one simple change. It's usually a combination of efforts. If additional resources are required to solve the problem, a simple business case is prepared to illustrate the issue, the solution, associated costs and the return on investment. Solving OHS problems is no different. A single action or change is unlikely to meet with success. The key is a multi faceted approach.

New research from the Institute for Work and Health seems to support this view. Their review of 22 randomized controlled studies found that worker education/training will bring about safer work practices but they caution that on its own, training may not reduce accidents and injuries. Training/education, when coupled with workplace change and monitoring implementation of what was learned in the training, will lead to real results.

So, what exactly is required, and where should you start?

Focus

Find the one risk you would really like to reduce or eliminate. The one thing that is causing the majority of accidents or concerns from staff.

Take a 3 pronged approach to reducing that risk:

- Identify what workplace changes (equipment, procedures, etc.) need to be made and if necessary prepare a business case to secure resources. Ensure changes are implemented.
- Communication/Training—Let everyone know about your initiative, what you are trying to achieve, how you plan to get there, what workplace changes will be seen, what their role in your plan is (even if it is only to be a cheerleader) and when you plan to report back next.
- Monitor compliance— Establish measures to ensure the knowledge and skills acquired in training are being implemented and the provisions of the work procedures are used as required.

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A Simple Illustration

Focus

A review of accident stats, WSIB costs and JHSC minutes clearly indicated the greatest area of concern was the risk posed by lifting of patients. While staff had learned good lifting technique in their professional training, much has been forgotten. Given the number of patient lifts required, the weight of the patients and awkward postures which are sometimes involved, it became clear that reducing risks involved in lifting was the place to start.

3-Pronged Approach

1) Communication/Training

All staff was informed of the initiative to reduce risk of injury associated with lifting patients through. Methods involved broadcast e-mails, articles in the staff newsletter, posting on the bulletin board and a presentation and progress report at each of the quarterly full staff meetings.

Specific staffs that lift patients were provided with training on the new lifting procedures, how and when to use the new lifting devices.

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2) Workplace Change

An analysis determined more lifting devices were needed which involved significant cost. A business case showing a decrease in accident costs and a return on the investment was proposed and approved, which resulted in a three year plan to gradually acquire the needed equipment.

Procedures relating to lifting were reviewed and changed incorporating the use of the new lifting devices and the ergonomic techniques.



3) Monitoring compliance

The employer established two methods of monitoring if the devices were being used in accordance with the procedures established. First, a formal audit was carried out to determine if lifting devices and techniques were used when indicated by pre-established factors and secondly, a randomized Behaviour Observation initiative was established which involved a number of staff checking if lifts and techniques were used by checking at random times.

Summary

By focussing on the right issue, the greatest concern or the area of highest risk/return, not only will you see improvement but it will allow you to practice the business-like ROI approach to OHS in a high profile area and establish a foundation to build on this success with future initiatives.

The 3 pronged approach ensures everyone is aware of the initiative, why it's being done, understands their role in it, and the expected outcome and progress toward success. It ensures new methods are supported by the employer, the right staffs get the right training and equipment, and supervision monitors to ensure success.

Most importantly, employees recognize the organizational commitment and you enjoy greater productivity and continuity of service as well as lower operating and benefits costs.

Need help with this focussed and comprehensive approach? PeopleRight can help you get started.