

## Changing the Safety Culture

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**ABSTRACT:** In 2016 a project was developed to improve the safety culture at Clarence Valley Council with the goal to improve safety systems, reduce incidents, increase Work Health Safety compliance and reduce injuries.

The project focused on changing workers mindset to think more about safer systems of work and involved:

- Simplification and improvements to safety procedures
- Safety Awareness programs such as:
  - Motivational speakers
  - Mental Health Awareness
  - Safety Slogan Campaign
  - Safety Text Messages
- Supervisor Training
- Internal Safety Grant
- Safety moments
- Worker training on the PerFORM program – a system to reduce musculoskeletal injuries
- Targeting areas of high incidents and injury claims

The 2017 Calendar year saw a 25% reduction in injury claims compared with the previous 3 years and a reduction in Council's workers compensation premium in 2017/2018 of \$594,000.

**KEYWORDS:** Safety, Culture Change, Insurance Premium, Compliance, Safety systems, Injury.

### 1 Introduction

In 2015/16 Council had 45 incidents of which 21 were Lost time Injuries totalling 1315 in lost hours. Management were concerned about the number of people were getting injured in the course of their daily activities and that if the trend continued there was a high possibility of a major injury. The WHS unit and Health and Safety Committee worked closely with management to develop a project to improve the safety culture within Council, with the key aim of reducing injuries across the organisation.

The project focussed on changing workers thinking regarding safety, improving training materials and techniques, improving communication and planning and targeting problem areas which were causing repeat incidents. The focus of the project was not solely related to physical safety, but also provided staff with tools and resources to assist them in dealing with mental health issues.

Throughout the project a number of initiatives were implemented to increase engagement and awareness with staff around safety related matters. It was well known early on in the development of the project that Council staff wouldn't have been able to deliver the project alone and as a result Council partnered with its regulators, insurers and advisors to assist in making the project a success.

The project achieved substantial outcomes. 2017/18 resulted in more than a 25% reduction in injury claims compared with the previous 3 years and lost hours down to 936; and a reduction in Council's workers compensation premium of \$594,000.

### 2 Project Concept and Objectives

The project's aim was to reduce injuries across Council.

The objectives of the project were to:

- Change the mindset of workers taking shortcuts and eliminate unsafe work practices;

- Increase compliance with safety systems;
- Make systems practical, simple, credible and outcomes focused;
- Develop systems which workers would follow even if no one was watching them;
- Ensure workers can easily interpret the procedures and train on them; and
- Have workers thinking about safety as a part of planning for works.

The focus points of the project were to:

- Achieve a reduction and simplification in paperwork;
- Increase engagement and make training easier;
- Improve risk assessment procedures;
- Ensure better communication and training;
- Adopt a consistent approach to safety across the organisation;
- Focus on problem areas which are causing repeat incidents; and
- Ensure all staff knew their roles and responsibilities with regard to workplace health and safety.

### 3 Project Planning and Development

It was identified that Council's injury rate was increasing and that most of the reported injuries were through: taking shortcuts; not communicating; and not properly assessing risks. As a result the project was developed in order to combat the increasing injury rate by changing the employee mindset and having staff being aware of and acting upon their roles and responsibilities with regard to workplace health and safety (WHS).

The project consisted of:

- Creating the support of Council's Health and Safety Committee (HSC);
- Developing a project plan which outlined objectives and associated timeframes;
- Having council's executive team support the project, including the endorsement of the project plan and allocation of a project budget;
- Planned roll out of the plan which initially targeted specific works teams and procedures;
- The identification and discussion of repeat incidents with the WHS team and the HSC;
- Empowering all staff to make: safety a priority; and a difference in the workplace;
- The development of 'Stop, Think, Talk, Act' campaign to bring safety forward in the thinking process prior to the

commencement of an activity. The campaign was supported by the making the phrase common language used by the executive and management and the production of: a campaign logo; collateral such as stickers on vehicles and other resources; and email banners; and

- The inclusion of mental health aspects to ensure that the focus of the project was solely about physical safety

#### 3.1 External Organisations

It was established as part of the project that assistance and influence from external organisations would assist in delivering the objectives of the project. Council had established good working relationships with its insurer and SafeWork NSW, and both organisations were keen to participate and assist in making the project a success.

#### 3.2 Safework NSW

SafeWork NSW (SafeWork) ran information sessions for supervisors to ensure awareness of their legislative roles and responsibilities and answered related questions on the WHS legislation. SafeWork also looked at some specific incidents that had occurred and what supervisors needed to think about and communicate before asking their workers to complete a task.

SafeWork's presentation focussed on workers ensuring that they planned their work carefully even on 5 minute jobs and didn't rush their jobs as this is when accidents happen. The presentation also led to the successful implementation of a verification of competency system for heavy plant.

#### 3.3 StateCover (Workers compensation insurer)

StateCover talked to supervisors whose team's had high incident rates. The basis of the discussions were to highlight that the rates of incident in particular crews were not normal injury rates for their industry, which provoked discussion on how the team could avoid incidents in the future.

For those teams with high rates of incidents StateCover ran Participative Ergonomics for Manual Tasks (PERforM) training. PERforM is a simple manual task risk management program

based on participative ergonomics, an internationally recommended approach for reducing musculoskeletal disorders.

The involvement of Statecover in creating awareness of workers was very successful. Following the presentations, a particular work team who were averaging more than 16 Lost Time Days per year, reduced their average to 1 day per year lost time

### **3.4 Motivational Speaker: Phil Smallman**

Council engaged Philip Smallman who talked to all staff about how he could have lost his life as a result of a workplace accident. Phil fell out of a tree when he didn't check his safety equipment properly and it failed. As a result he will now spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair. Phil advised that one small lapse in concentration caused his world to come crashing down.

Phil talked about:

- The importance of the small things when it comes to safety
- Do workers accept personal responsibility and accountability for their safety and the safety of their workmates?
- Do they transfer a safe life ethic to their home life as well?
- The impact his injury had on his own life and how it had financial, social, emotional and psychological effects.

Phil's presentation was well received and appeared to have immediate effects on workers mind set, not long after Phil's talk Clarence Valley Council saw a period of 9 months without a serious incident.

### **3.5 Mock Court Australia: Bruce Whitehead**

Bruce briefed workers on a blend of legal and practical knowledge of the Work, Health and Safety legislation with a confronting look at what the legal obligations of organisations and supervisors are. Bruce is a former prosecutor with SafeWork and using this knowledge and experience he advised how to develop practical, simple, and credible outcomes focused safety systems to encourage workers to follow them, even when no one is watching over them. This included how supervisors needed to train, monitor and supervise workers. This had a major impact on supervisor focus to develop better systems and train and supervise staff.

In order to demonstrate how a decision can affect a worker and their organisation, Bruce and his team conducted a mock trial in which Council staff played roles and were subjected to significant cross examination and other pressures of a legal environment.

### **3.6 The Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMPH)**

The project's focus was not solely about physical safety and was to be a genuine wellbeing project to raise mental health awareness and give workers resources and tools to deal with mental health issues for themselves, their families and their fellow workers. The RAMHP is a state-wide program funded by the NSW Ministry of Health that links rural people to the help they need. Council partnered with RAMPH to create awareness, deliver training and provide resources to do this.

The activities undertaken with RAMPH were:

- Mental Health Awareness Workshops and First aid training
- RUOK Month – In September 2017, Council and RAMPH held lunchtime BBQ's at Council sites for workers to come and engage; Promoted RUOK awareness through the use of email banners and the distribution of RUOK merchandise.
- Council staff formed a team to participate in Movember to raise the profile of men's health.

## **4 Project Outcomes**

Council realised a number of successes in the 2017 calendar year and the 2017/2018 financial year as result of the project. The successes listed below reveal some of the positive outcomes of the project:

- A 25% reduction in injury claims and a near 50% reduction in lost time injuries in comparison with the previous 3 years;
- A \$594,000 reduction on Council's workers compensation premium in 2017/2018;
- Safety adopted as one of Council's organisational values;
- A shifted mindset of the workforce regarding safety - Safety is now treated proactively rather than reactively;
- All meetings begin with a safety moment where a member of the meeting raises a pertinent safety point
- The conversion of 300 hard to read, lengthy SWMS into 120 easy to read job specific

SWP's and the development of 27 high risk SWMS

- An Internal Safety Grant Program encouraged workers to identify safety improvement suggestions.. There were 23 submissions vying for an internal grant of \$10,000. While only a few submissions could be catered for under the initial funding, all of the other safety issues were reviewed by management and 20 out of the 23 suggestions were completed with the managers of each section finding additional funds from their operational budgets.

The following figures demonstrate the success of the project:

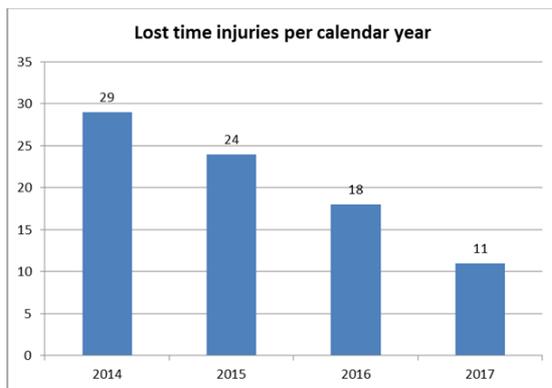


Figure 1: Lost Time Injures per calendar year

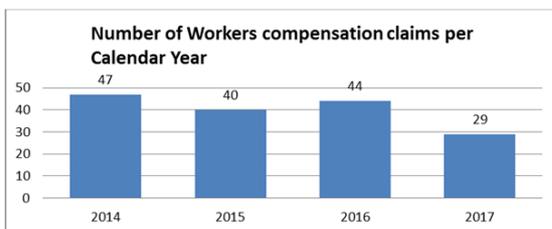


Figure 2: Workers compensation claims per calendar year

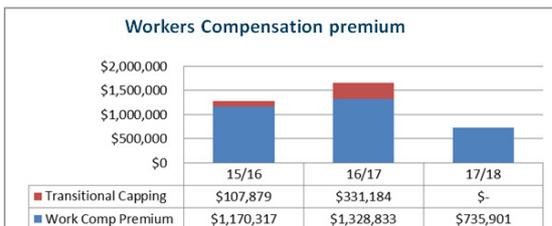


Figure 3: Workers Compensation Premium

## 5 Conclusion

The Changing the Safety Culture Project has proven to be highly effective. The fact that the success has come through making Council's processes and tools simpler and having staff be aware and responsible for their actions relating to safety is a good outcome. The initiatives that have been deployed have not been expensive, we have not created difficult procedures and / or copious amounts of paperwork and forms; instead existing processes were refined and where possible simplified.

It is clear from the metrics and the financial savings that the project has been a success. As a result of the project, Clarence Valley Council staff now have safety at the forefront of their thinking when it comes to any task.

Most importantly, Council has a higher level of engagement with its staff around safety, and our staff are not going home injured after a days work.