

Worker involvement best practice

This document contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

Promoting worker involvement in the Rail Industry – How are you doing?

In March 2004, the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) published a *Collective declaration on worker involvement*, which encouraged greater worker involvement in health and safety matters.

ORR believes that there is much good practice on worker involvement in the rail industry. ORR is keen to work together with the rail industry to encourage and promote this. The aim of this paper is to highlight the key components of effective worker involvement.

‘Workers who are encouraged to have a voice and are given the ability to influence health and safety are safer and healthier than those who do not.’ HSC’s *Collective declaration on worker involvement*.

‘The industry accepts and will adopt HSC’s *Collective declaration on worker involvement*. Employers will facilitate the work of trades unions’ safety representatives and actively support safety committees, recognising that collaboration and trust between employers and their workforce provides a reality check on the value of safety rules and helps to ensure compliance.’
Rail Safety and Standards Board’s Strategic Safety Plan 2005

Business benefits of health and safety

There is a growing body of evidence indicating that effective worker involvement and consultation on health and safety has a positive impact both on individual workers and organisations as a whole:

- Workers who are involved are more committed and feel more valued. This is reflected in greater job satisfaction and lower likelihood of leaving the organisation.

- For the organisation, it can result in improved solutions to health and safety problems, reduced injuries and ill health, increased productivity and reduced sickness absence and staff turnover.

Examples of real-life case studies that show how various businesses have benefited from improving their management of health and safety are available on the Health & Safety Executive's website. The case studies can be accessed from their website at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/involvement/casestudies.htm>

Here are some examples:

- One company saved £12 for every £1 it spent.
- A 73% reduction in employee insurance claims and 18% fewer days lost to injuries.
- A 50% reduction in civil claims.

Role of safety representatives and representatives of employee safety

There are four main stages of management, and appointed or elected safety representatives have an important role to play in each of these four stages:

1 Analysis

Assisting managers in assessing risks.

2 Planning

Assisting managers develop health and safety measures that are effective in practice.

Safety representatives have legal rights to:

- be consulted 'in good time' over a large range of health and safety issues; and
- have access to relevant health and safety information.

These enable the safety representative to play an informed part in helping employers to develop ways to manage health and safety.

3 Doing

Helping workers to work safely and remain healthy.

Safety representatives have legal rights to:

- be appointed or elected from the workforce they represent; and
- paid time away from their normal duties to carry out their functions.

These provide the basis to advocate health and safety with workers and see through the effective implementation of any measures taken.

4 Monitoring/reviewing

Helping employers understand whether any health and safety measures are and remain effective in practice.

Safety representatives have legal rights to:

- inspect the workplace;
- investigate any potential hazards, dangerous occurrences and causes of accidents at the workplace;
- investigate complaints relating to workers' health, safety or welfare at work;
- make representations to employers on behalf of the workers they represent;
- have access to employers to discuss health and safety issues; and
- consult and receive information from Enforcing Authority inspectors.

These provide the employers and Enforcing Authorities with a vital insight into how well health and safety is managed in the workplace.

Key components of effective worker involvement

- Leadership from top management down through the management chain needs to be continuing and ongoing.

How does the company demonstrate leadership and commitment to get good worker involvement?

- Commitment from the workforce and their safety representatives to working in partnership.

Does the company have the appropriate number of safety representatives? If not, what could it do to encourage and make it easy for people to come forward?

- Everyone involved possesses the skills, training, resources and time to engage with one another properly.

Do all managers have the right skills and training?

Do safety representatives have the skills, training resources and time away from their normal duties?

- Proper consultation. This means:
 - seeking safety representatives' views as early as possible before decisions are made; and
 - being receptive to those views and providing feedback.

Does the company seek workers' views before decisions are made so far as possible?

How does the company show that it has taken workers' views into account?

Consultation and health and safety

Measures taken to manage health and safety should be incorporated within the general approach any business takes to manage the risks they face. Good people management procedures should include consultation with staff and apply to the four stages of good management:

1 Analysis

A constructive and consensual approach to managing risks is important to build trust between senior management and the workforce. Listening to each other's views and pragmatic thinking is the way forward. It is also important that managers at the top of the company lead on managing risks.

2 Planning

At this stage, **consultation** can assist in identifying any problems and in determining the practical solutions that may exist.

3 Doing

It is critical that once action is identified to remedy a problem, such action is implemented. Again, if the workforce has been **consulted** at the planning stage, they are more likely to 'buy into' and accept the need to take action and get 'buy in'.

4 Monitoring/reviewing

Once action has been taken, employers need to ensure it is effective. By **consulting** with the workforce, employers can see if their action is working. If there are problems, the workforce can then be involved in proposing solutions.

Time for fulfilling these roles

All safety representatives need to be consulted 'in good time' about health and safety measures. They are entitled to be given adequate paid time to consult with their fellow workers and get their views. Those views then need to be reported back to managers before any relevant decision is taken.

Safety committees or work groups

Safety committees or work groups have been shown to work well and help the employer develop, promote, monitor and amend their approaches to managing health and safety. However, if committees are not resourced and directed properly, they can be ineffective.

The following key points highlight what safety committees should do to operate effectively:

- develop safe systems of work and safety procedures;
- look at all arrangements for managing health and safety, including return-to work arrangements for sickness absence;
- analyse accidents and causes of notifiable occupational diseases;
- review risk assessments;
- consider reports submitted by safety representatives;
- monitor the effectiveness of health and safety training;
- consider reports and factual information provided by environmental health officers and ORR inspectors;
- monitor and review the adequacy of health and safety communication and publicity within the workplace; and
- continuously monitor all arrangements for health and safety and revise them wherever necessary.