



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner

Federal Safety Commissioner's

Safety Principles & Guidance

A practical guide for improving OHS in
the building and construction industry

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Federal Safety Commissioner's Safety Principles

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Industry participants should demonstrate a tangible commitment to developing a safety culture within their companies and across the building and construction industry.

Principle 2

Clients should demonstrate OHS leadership at all stages of the construction process by acting as exemplars in their relationships with other industry participants.

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Industry participants should strive to develop cooperative business relationships to ensure that time, cost and quality objectives do not compromise a commitment to OHS.

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Industry participants should ensure they maintain effective OHS measures across the construction project life cycle and are able to respond to changes in the construction environment.

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Industry participants should monitor, report and benchmark OHS at the site, project and company levels to improve and compare OHS performance.

Federal Safety Commissioner's Preface

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The building and construction industry is dynamic, diverse and of critical importance to Australia's economy and our way of life. The health of the industry is directly linked to the health of its people. While improvements have been made in OHS, too many Australians are still being killed and injured every year.

These Safety Principles and the accompanying Guidance aim to encourage all the participants in the building and construction industry to strive for a higher level of safety. Commitment to these Safety Principles means going beyond complying with basic legislative obligations and demonstrating a real commitment to sustained improvement in OHS. I urge all industry participants to make this commitment.

Improving OHS is a shared responsibility. Everybody associated with the industry has a role to play. For my part, and that of my Office, I will continue to develop and maintain open, transparent and consultative partnerships with all industry participants.

The guidance material provided for each of the principles is intended as advisory only. Industry participants are encouraged to identify their own innovative initiatives to demonstrate their commitment to the principles and thereby improve their safety performance.

This approach is consistent with the Australian Government's decision to establish the Federal Safety Commissioner; a decision that provides a practical example of a government leading by example to build safer and healthier workplaces and to strengthen its capacity to influence OHS outcomes.



Tom Fisher
Federal Safety Commissioner

1:

Principle One

Industry participants should demonstrate a tangible commitment to developing a safety culture within their companies and across the building and construction industry.

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Industry participants should demonstrate a tangible commitment to developing a safety culture within their companies and across the building and construction industry.

Industry participants, including senior managers of building and construction companies and major clients, need to demonstrate a tangible commitment to OHS in order to achieve substantial improvement to the industry's culture. Industry participants should take an active role in ensuring that OHS is a key consideration before and during the construction phase.

Demonstrated senior management commitment to a safety culture publicly conveys to all parties that the prevention of death, injury, illness and disease is the highest priority. The way industry participants demonstrate their OHS leadership will vary according to their role in the industry, however some common elements are:

- Allocating OHS responsibility to senior management and at board level;
- Involving senior management in OHS consultative forums;
- Ensuring that OHS is a key procurement consideration before and during the construction phase;
- Factoring OHS considerations into all decisions and at all stages of a project;
- Ensuring OHS legislative obligations are understood, planned for and met;
- Providing appropriate time and resources to promote and improve OHS performance;
- Involving all affected groups in relevant decision making for OHS issues; and
- Working constructively, and in partnership, with regulators and the OHS community to identify OHS improvement opportunities.

2:

Principle Two

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Procurement planning and tender assessment criteria should include OHS as a distinct and important component. Clients should establish clear OHS expectations and standards of performance for service providers to be assessed against.

Clients should actively assess and monitor OHS risks for each of their projects. They should establish OHS performance and reporting requirements, and manage relationships with service providers so as to minimise project OHS risk. Clients need to be rigorous in their assessment of the OHS management capabilities and OHS performance record of service providers. Model clients should ensure transparent and responsive management of OHS issues throughout the contract management stage as well as reporting on OHS performance benchmarks during and at the end of a project.

The model client can develop a strong safety culture and provide leadership in OHS through the following behaviours:

- Incorporating OHS considerations at every level and at every stage of their construction projects from concept to procurement to completion;
- During the procurement process, rigorously assessing the competency of service providers to manage OHS on the project concerned and their commitment to (and achievements in) bringing about continuous improvement in OHS;
- Clearly defining the OHS risks associated with projects that potential tenderers may have to manage;
- Identifying the time and resource implications of managing any OHS risks to the standard expected in tender briefs;
- Ensuring contractual provisions clearly set out OHS requirements and procedures for resolving any OHS issues that may arise in the construction process;
- Giving the head contractor a whole-of-project accountability for OHS processes and practices to be followed by all contractors on site;
- Ensuring the OHS standards set for contractors are also applied to the client organisation itself, and particularly to client staff interacting with contractors on project sites;
- Establishing meaningful and reliable OHS performance benchmarks to assess contractors against;
- Conducting frequent reviews during and on completion of projects;
- Maintaining records of project performance and using this information in future projects; and
- Working closely and cooperatively with the Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner and other relevant OHS agencies to promote improved OHS.

3:

Principle Three

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Competitive pressures in the building and construction industry can lead to OHS imperatives being displaced by time, cost and quality objectives. The development of more cooperative relationships between industry participants, which recognise the likelihood of delays and variation, will help to ensure that there is always sufficient time to complete work safely. This collaborative approach can achieve the combined goals of project outcomes that meet the requirements of clients, and work practices that maximise the safety of everyone on site.

Incorporating health and safety issues into the construction planning, risk assessment and decision making process is important if the time, cost and quality objectives of a project are to be met without compromising the safety of everyone involved in construction.

From the preliminary design stage, through to the contract award and project management stages, appropriate time should be allocated to understanding and meeting the OHS demands of a project. Specification of works and expected standards should establish timeframes that allow work to be completed safely as well as on time. Similarly, the resources required to complete work safely should be clearly understood and articulated from design to project management stages.

In the event of a variation in design or delays in construction, such as those caused by inclement weather or changing client needs, industry participants should reassess OHS risks and timeframes and, if necessary, review delivery dates. A cooperative approach will help to ensure that sufficient time is allocated to work safely.

“More cooperative relationships between industry participants... help ensure there is always sufficient time to complete work safely.”

4:

Principle Four

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Industry participants should ensure that safe design and constructability is considered at the planning and procurement stages to reduce or eliminate hazards and control risks before construction commences.

Identification and elimination of OHS risk at the design stage of a project is critical to minimising risk in the construction stage. Safe design can be facilitated by:

- Selecting design consultants who have a demonstrated capacity to consider OHS risks and minimise them through design;
- Requiring an assessment of possible OHS risks that may be encountered during construction, despite minimisation efforts. The outcome of this assessment should then be factored into project planning and decision making processes, and shared with construction service providers so they too understand the risks associated with proposed materials and construction methods;
- Requiring an assessment of OHS risks that may be encountered in the end use of the building or structure, for instance in conducting regular maintenance;
- Establishing an integrated project team (or suitable equivalent) including designers, contractors and client representatives at the earliest stage practicable; and
- Requiring construction service providers to consider OHS in the design of work procedures, particularly the construction processes to be used, and to demonstrate throughout the project how constructability considerations have been taken into account.

The identification and elimination of OHS risk should be an integral element in finalising or varying design.

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5:

Principle Five

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OHS performance is closely linked with overall project management success throughout the construction process and across all the participants involved. Separate systems and fragmented decision making can reduce efficient coordination of effort on worksites, and can also lead to communication breakdowns and the scheduling of incompatible activities.

Making consultation part of the project management approach creates an environment that is conducive to identifying OHS issues early on and managing them effectively. It involves clients, designers, consultants, contractors and workers discussing identified risks and appropriate control measures.

Clients should establish consultative arrangements to consider OHS issues early in the project lifecycle. Contractors should ensure that effective consultation on OHS is extended broadly on a project, and that adequate resources are provided to achieve this. All parties should understand and acknowledge their OHS responsibilities.

Consultation between affected parties in an appropriate and timely manner will help to ensure that OHS issues are effectively managed. When risks are identified, discussion between clients, designers, consultants, contractors and workers will help develop appropriate risk control measures. Making sure enough expertise, resources, information and time are made available is important to establishing a meaningful consultation process.

OHS information needs to be passed through the supply chain so that those directly involved are aware of hazards and prevention measures. Hazard information needs to be accessible and easily understood by everyone who may be exposed to the hazards themselves.

Clear and responsive means of dealing with any OHS issues that arise should be established, and the best available OHS knowledge used to assist in resolving these issues.

6:

Principle Six

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A systematic approach is how an organisation translates its policy into practice. This is essential in the building and construction industry, where the actions of many participants need to be coordinated and where circumstances may change rapidly.

The essential foundation of a systematic approach is an OHS policy. The policy should indicate the OHS values and objectives of the organisation. It should be consistent with, and supportive of, legislative obligations. The policy should be available to all parties influenced by the organisation's activities. Policy objectives should be translated into health and safety actions and responsibilities in a systematic way. Procedures need to be documented and authorised at an appropriate level, and practice should be consistent with policy.

A Systematic Approach

An effective systematic approach should set out arrangements to:

- Address all OHS legislative obligations relevant to a project;
- Apply a risk management approach that identifies all the likely hazards and matching elimination/prevention measures;
- Set out the project's specific OHS requirements in clear and easily understood procedures that are available to all parties;
- Facilitate the elimination or reduction of risks through measures to 'design out' high risk activities;
- Consult with affected parties in an appropriate and timely manner;
- Inform and assist subcontractors on how to meet agreed OHS standards and practices;
- Make sure that plant used, purchased or hired for a project meets all relevant design standards, and that suppliers and operators meet their respective obligations;
- Plan work scheduling and work flows to ensure the safest mix of activities, people, plant and materials;
- Select the safest properties and materials, and ensure any risks associated with their use are understood by all workers;
- Ensure all project staff are adequately trained, and that the equipment and materials they use are fit for the purpose;
- Establish appropriate emergency and first response measures;
- Monitor OHS measures to ensure systems and procedures are working effectively; and
- Investigate and correct any incidents or system breakdowns.

Effective implementation of an OHS management system will be evident when it continues to operate effectively despite the absence of particular individuals from the site.

A Whole-of-Project Focus

A whole-of-project focus is critical if procedures to manage hazards are to be applied effectively across a project. The head contractor is responsible for establishing and maintaining such a focus and for ensuring consistency in its application by everyone working on the project.

In addition to the features of a systematic approach listed above, there is a need to:

- Ensure all contractors engaged on the project have suitable OHS expertise and commitment;
- Develop and implement a project-specific OHS plan that includes all the responsible parties involved;
- Ensure contractors develop and apply safe working procedures that are site specific;
- Pass on OHS information through the supply chain to make sure all project participants are aware of hazards and prevention measures;
- Ensure all forms of communication are easily accessible, and understandable by everyone involved in a project; and
- Report on OHS performance across the whole project.

A systematic approach to the management of OHS should ensure that well recognised and accepted prevention measures are applied across the whole project. Where special circumstances or changing conditions apply, a risk assessment should be used to determine the best prevention strategy. Where the nature of the hazard or situation makes a reliable assessment difficult then a precautionary approach should be taken.

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7:

Principle Seven

Industry participants should ensure they maintain effective OHS measures across the construction project life cycle and are able to respond to changes in the construction environment.

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Industry participants should ensure they maintain effective OHS measures across the construction project life cycle and are able to respond to changes in the construction environment.

The dynamic nature of the construction task requires not only good OHS planning, but also the ability to monitor the measures in place and respond to changing conditions.

The breakdown of OHS prevention measures due to changes in personnel, rapid changes in environmental conditions, or identification of unpredicted requirements needs rapid and flexible rectification.

A durable and responsive approach to OHS management can be achieved by:

- Integrating OHS into broader project management;
- Ensuring that any new conditions or circumstances encountered on projects are subject to risk assessment;
- Facilitating collaboration and communication between key participants, such as designers and contractors, when construction tasks and methods have to be altered to meet changing circumstances;
- Taking an active approach to implementing safety initiatives over and above minimum statutory requirements in order to deal with the dynamic nature of the construction process;
- Implementing OHS measures and practices that provide the highest level of protection that is practicable for those on site and in adjacent areas, which is not solely dependent on personal protective equipment;
- Incorporating the possibility of abnormal working conditions into project planning; and
- Briefing and training staff on new requirements or changed roles that arise during the project life cycle.

8:

Principle Eight

Industry participants should monitor, report and benchmark OHS at the site, project and company levels to improve and compare OHS performance.

Principle 8

Industry participants should monitor, report and benchmark OHS at the site, project and company levels to improve and compare OHS performance.

The head contractor should take responsibility for overall project OHS monitoring and reporting, including in relation to the OHS performance of other service providers engaged on the project. Project benchmarks should be established and regularly reported against.

Monitoring arrangements should be targeted towards identified project risks, using approaches such as audit; inspection and testing of work activities, equipment and materials; and health surveillance. The project regime should set out the corrective/preventive action to be taken where non-conformance is identified by audit, inspection and testing procedures or as the result of a direction by an OHS regulatory agency.

The quality and accuracy of any records that must be maintained under OHS legislation, such as health monitoring, should be part of the testing and reporting regime.

All aspects of the project monitoring arrangements should be covered by regular project OHS reports provided to the client. Project reporting requirements should include reports of OHS audits and inspections of the principal construction service provider and other service providers; reports of incidents and system failures; and reports arising from statutory requirements.

Any incidents resulting in death, injury, illness, or disease, or with the potential for such impacts, should be investigated. The key requirements of an OHS investigation are establishing what happened and why; identifying factors that contributed to the incident; taking action to prevent a recurrence; providing feedback to all parties; and making sure any regulatory requirements for reporting and recording incidents are met.

Positive Performance Measures

Historically, the most common measures of performance in the building and construction industry have been injury or claims-based measures. Many organisations use injury, illness and other incident data to measure outcomes. Lost Time Injury Frequency Rates (LTIFR), despite their deficiencies, remain a commonly used measure. However, they should be supplemented with positive performance measures.

Positive measures focus on assessing how successfully an organisation is performing by monitoring the processes that should produce good OHS outcomes. These measures are created by identifying the factors that influence performance such as training, auditing and design changes.

Clients and service providers should establish a suite of OHS performance measures; tailored to the project's phases and OHS risk profile, with an appropriate balance of standard and positive performance measures.

Industry-specific Measures

It is appropriate to use measures such as injury frequency and incidence rates to allow comparison of performance with other industries. Where possible, these should be supplemented with industry-specific measures. This may involve developing performance measures using industry-specific denominators such as contract value or measuring the effectiveness of contractor management arrangements. Basing performance measures on the whole project (as well as against individual companies working on site) is another way of establishing a more reliable picture of OHS performance.

Reporting and Comparing OHS Performance

Reporting on OHS performance should assist in driving a process of continuous improvement. Reporting to clients should relate to performance on particular projects, as well as to aggregate annual performance. It should not only reflect on unsatisfactory outcomes, but should also recognise achievements in the effective management of OHS. Open reporting is more useful when it can be compared against benchmarks that the industry has established as reasonable targets for everyone in the industry.

Review and Improvement

Regular reviews of OHS performance should be undertaken, and should involve all relevant parties. Corrective actions or changes to the project OHS management system should be made where deficiencies are identified. These changes should be reported through the project OHS monitoring and reporting regime. Practices leading to good performance should be highlighted and recognised.



Further information

Further information about these Safety Principles & Guidance is available from the Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner.

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