



Case Study: Hand Safety Awareness

The challenge

For all of the recent advancements in technology and equipment, building and construction is still a very ‘hands on’ industry. It should therefore come as no surprise that a high number of incidents reported to the OFSC involve hand and finger injuries. Statistics from the 2013 July to December Analysis of Biannual Data show that over a third of injuries reported by our accredited contractors occurred on the upper limbs (41%). Hand injuries can be costly in terms of lost time and productivity, but more importantly can also be devastating to workers.

The importance of reviewing data

A number of accredited companies recently reviewed their own internal injury data and reached a similar conclusion; that a high proportion of reported injuries relate to hands and fingers. Having identified this trend, accredited companies Lipman Pty Ltd, Cooper & Oxley Builders, Sitzler Pty Ltd, and Sarah Constructions Pty Ltd are now addressing the high instance of hand injuries through a number of targeted hand safety awareness initiatives. This highlights the importance of not only accurately reporting incidents internally, but also conducting regular reviews of collected incident data in order to effectively focus WHS initiatives on problem areas.

Raising awareness

In response to these findings each company sought to reduce the instance of hand injuries by both raising awareness of the importance of basic hand safety within their workforce and combating complacency.

Sarah Constructions distributed a hand safety awareness poster titled ‘Five Steps to Hand Safety’ to all of its sites. The poster includes statistics

regarding the number of hand injuries sustained by Sarah’s workforce and provides steps to follow to reduce the number of injuries. The poster was designed to act as a prompt for conversations around hand safety issues and the wearing of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). The importance of PPE is to be further highlighted in a second poster, currently in development, that identifies the types of gloves specific trades should require.

Lipman launched an initiative with the catchy slogan ‘TAKE 5 to KEEP 5’. The campaign includes training presentations and site posters designed to raise awareness of common causes of hand injuries and provide workers with five simple steps to help prevent injury.

Shock Value

Sitzler designed and distributed its own poster depicting extremely graphic hand injuries and has used shock value to raise awareness of the potential impacts hand injuries can have on workers. The posters were accompanied by toolbox talks discussing hand injury statistics, causational factors and tips on how to assess the risks to hands involved in different work tasks.



Subcontractors

Sarah Constructions also considered subcontractors to be an important aspect of their awareness program and has included a discussion of Sarah’s ‘Five Steps to Hand Safety’ poster in all site specific subcontractor inductions. The company also requires subcontractors to identify specific controls which limit hand injuries in all Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS) and Job Safety Environmental Analyses (JSEA). Sarah’s aim is for these subcontractors to take this awareness and concern for hand safety with them to other sites.

The use of gloves

Each company also reviewed its PPE policy regarding gloves as a possible method of reducing the number of hand injuries.



Cooper & Oxley Builders trialed mandatory glove use over a two week period at their Shenton House construction site. The company invited a safety glove consultant to survey workers about their experiences wearing gloves while undertaking a number of different work tasks. The aim of the trial was to instil the importance of basic hand safety in their workers, making them think about the kind of treatment their hands receive on the job, and hopefully reduce hand injuries.

Sitzler consulted with a variety of different trade groups on the introduction of a mandatory glove policy, and implemented Safe Work Observations to monitor work tasks with and without the use of gloves. Sitzler found that while gloves reduced hazards for some workers other trade groups were visibly hindered by wearing gloves. This has allowed the company to tailor its glove policy to ensure adding gloves to tasks did not add additional risks.

Lipman has issued gloves and glove clips to all workers to ensure they will be available when required. Sarah Constructions has made various glove types available to its workers and subcontractors in preparation for the distribution of its new ‘Hand Protection Selection Guide’ poster.

The results

The four companies have experienced a number of positive outcomes from these hand safety initiatives including:

- a statistical reduction in the incidence of hand injuries
- an increase in worker and subcontractor awareness of the major causes of hand injuries
- worker input into PPE policies
- greater use of work gloves by workers
- discussion of hand safety issues by workers and site safety personnel
- cultural change.

Each of the initiatives is ongoing with awareness posters a fixture in on-site amenities and hand safety a regular agenda item at toolbox talks across the companies. The hope from these four accredited companies is that through ongoing education workers will be reminded that hand injuries are preventable and that their numbers will continue to decrease.

About these case studies

The Australian Government is committed to improving the WHS standards for all workers on building and construction projects.

These case studies have been developed to share practical ideas that can be adopted by industry to assist in their own management of WHS issues.

The Federal Safety Commissioner consults widely with industry, WHS authorities and other relevant agencies to promote a cooperative approach to improving WHS performance.

The vision of the Federal Safety Commissioner is a building and construction industry where no one is harmed.

For further information:

- Visit the FSC website at www.fsc.gov.au
- Contact the FSC Assist Line on **1800 652 500**
- Contact the OFSC via email at ofsc@dewr.gov.au

The Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner has prepared this case study to promote workplace health and safety (WHS) in the industry. When developing OHS initiatives, businesses and individuals should consider the circumstances and requirements particular to them and seek professional advice where required.

While the Commonwealth has exercised reasonable care in providing useful information, the Commonwealth makes no representations, express or implied, as to the accuracy of the information contained in this case study. The Commonwealth accepts no liability for any use of the information contained in this case study or any reliance placed on it.

This case study may list persons, organisations, products or services or may incorporate material sourced from third parties. Such lists or material are assembled in good faith. However, any such list or material does not necessarily constitute any form of endorsement by the Commonwealth of that person, organisation, product, service, or third party. The Commonwealth does not accept any responsibility for such list or material.