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Effective Safety Communication: beyond the noticeboard

In the March 2010 issue of Insight, QRMC's Adrian Savage outlined ways to maximise the successful use of safety noticeboards as a communication tool.



However, in an age in which technology plays a vital role in all areas of communication, it is important to look beyond the safety noticeboard to consider whether other mechanisms for communicating safety information might be more valuable to your organisation.

In Queensland, the Workplace Health and Safety Act stipulates that information is to be provided to persons within a workplace to ensure health and safety. This is commonly interpreted by WHSQ (and within prominent audit criteria) as requiring information pertaining to OHS to be posted “in a conspicuous position, in a way likely to come to the attention of the workers”. However, there is no direct requirement for the communication to be a physical noticeboard, and there is opportunity to explore other more effective means of communication that suit your organisation's work practices.

In 2010 many, if not the majority, of people in the workplace are familiar with accessing information from electronic means such as the internet. Looking to a notice board for new information would be akin to making a phone call using a telephone with rotary dialling – it functions, but it's a bit behind the times. Consequently it is appropriate for safety professionals to consider moving away from the notice board to other means of communication that fulfil the requirement to be “in a conspicuous position, in a way likely to come to the attention of the workers”.

Such alternate communication methods may include:

- on screen displays and messages for those who spend a large part of their day in front of a computer
- electronic screens in meal rooms, transit spaces, appropriate work areas etc.

The advantages are many, including being able to ensure that information is readily updated, being able to display a greater amount of information, and being able to display the information more effectively due to the use of colour, graphics and animation.

This being said, it is important to keep sight of the fact that there is a legislative requirement to have certain pieces of information accessible to all workers; for example in Queensland, the Company OHS Policy, WHSQ's Form 11 detailing the WHSR's entitlements, and the site evacuation plan. These types of information are therefore better managed as fixed “hard copy” notices.

Pandemic Preparedness: not just something for the big boys

During 2009 when the swine flu pandemic reached its peak, it became clear that many businesses in Australia were not in a position to respond to the potential impact on their workforce or other critical business functions.

As Benjamin Franklin said over 200 years ago "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail". However, businesses tend to forget the ongoing need for planning and preparing for the worst.

With the flu season again upon us, it's worth taking a moment to think about how your business would cope if the office were largely deserted due to high incidence of staff illness, unwillingness of staff to leave home or failure of public infrastructure and transport systems as a result of pandemic.



A lot of small to medium businesses in particular do not pay a great deal of attention to business continuity issues and pandemic preparedness, assuming that only large organisations need to take the trouble to consider these management strategies. However, the reality is that in many cases small to medium sized businesses are least able to withstand the loss of critical staff or processes, and can be less resilient in the event of a pandemic or other crisis due to the limited resources (human and otherwise) at their disposal in comparison to larger organisations.

And remember – it doesn't have to be a world pandemic event to trigger a crisis in your organisation. A localised epidemic impacting your staff can do just as much or more damage than a more widely spread event.

Things you can do to prepare your organisation:

Before a pandemic event

- review Business Continuity Management arrangements to make sure pandemic is considered
- consider remote IT access and working from home arrangements
- ensure communication channels are robust and that you can contact employees, suppliers and customers in a crisis
- ensure good practices for record keeping and documentation of corporate knowledge are in place to minimise the impact of the absence of critical individuals
- educate your employees, contractors, critical suppliers and key customers regarding your preparedness plans
- formally test the contingency plans while there's still time to refine them.

During a pandemic event

- focus on the actual 'impact' on your organisation, don't be distracted by the broader reactions of the public
- review the assumptions applied to staff availability within Business Continuity Plans
- improve the quality and frequency of cleaning and disinfection processes
- reassure and communicate with employees to keep them informed
- keep in contact with key suppliers and customers to manage rumours and speculation.

If your organisation doesn't have tested preparedness plans in place in which your staff have been trained, [QRMC](#) can assist with development, review, implementation, training or testing.

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