

Chapter 3

Safety Culture

Your organisation must have safety as a primary goal.

3.1 Guidance from volume 1

The most important factor in achieving safety is creating a safety culture. This means running an organisation so that safety is seen as a primary goal and considered appropriately in every activity. Everyone should understand that achieving safety will help to meet business goals. Setting up safety procedures is not enough. All staff should understand why these procedures are necessary and use them.

3.2 Background

An organisation's safety culture is its general approach and attitude towards safety.

In a good safety culture, safety always comes first, and this will be apparent in the work that the organisation produces. Safety is built into the organisation's products, and its safety procedures support what is already being achieved.

A good safety culture may be achieved through a combination of sound safety policy set by management, awareness on everyone's part of the importance of safety in all activities, and motivation to put safety policy into practice.

This chapter provides guidance on fostering a good safety culture and explains the key role of an explicit safety policy in doing this. It describes the content of safety policy statements and how an organisation may implement them.

There are certain legal obligations on employers, relating to their safety policy. See volume 1 for further details.

This chapter is written for:

- directors and managers wishing to establish or improve the safety culture within their organisation.

3.3 The benefits of a safety culture

In an organisation with a good safety culture, everyone:

- is aware of the importance of safety;
- makes safety the highest priority in all that they do;
- continually strives to improve safety; and
- understands the parts of the law and other regulations that are relevant to them.

The benefits of nurturing a good safety culture are that:

- safety is built into the organisation's products and services;
- potential hazards and failures are detected and eliminated or controlled early;
- the organisation's products are safe and visibly so;
- the organisation realises efficiencies and cost savings; and
- the risk of not conforming to legal obligations is reduced.

A good safety culture will enhance an organisation's reputation, whereas a single major incident can ruin it. Indeed a major incident can mar the reputation of the industry as a whole, and cause harm to many of the interdependent organisations that contribute to and rely on the industry's success.

Richard Profit, in his book '*Systematic Safety Management in the Air Traffic Services*' [F.2], specifies other significant benefits to an organisation's business of creating a good safety culture (page 19). This book is recommended for further reading on ESM.

3.4 Safety policy

The starting point for a good safety culture is a commitment on the part of management. This is best expressed by the setting of a safety policy, endorsed by the board of directors. A safety policy should state the organisation's aims for achieving safety.

The safety policy statements should define the fundamental approach to managing safety within the organisation. They should encompass both process and product safety issues. It is up to each individual organisation to define their own set of safety policy statements, according to the nature of their business. However, the safety policy statements should cover the following issues:

- confirmation that safety is a primary goal for the organisation;
- definition of management's responsibility and accountability for safety performance;
- the responsibility of everyone in the organisation for ensuring safety;
- the provision of assurance that products meet safety requirements;
- the continual improvement in safety within the organisation;
- compliance with regulations and standards; and
- the reduction of risk 'so far as is reasonably practicable'.

These last two points are linked, since the '*Health and Safety at Work etc Act, 1974*' requires the reduction of risk 'so far as is reasonably practicable'. However, this should be explicitly confirmed in the organisation's safety policy.

Absolute safety cannot be guaranteed and attempting to achieve it can distort the allocation of resources, so safety should be balanced against other factors.

This means that:

- although safety should be a primary goal, it is not the only goal;
- pursuit of safety at all costs is not advisable; and
- judgement is required to know when to stop trying to reduce risk.

Some examples of other organisations' safety policy statements are given in appendix D.

By defining the safety policy statements, ensuring that they are effectively implemented, and monitoring their effect on safety and on the organisation, it is possible to encourage and develop a good safety culture. Setting safety policy statements alone is not enough. Management should nurture and encourage good safety practices, monitor safety, and provide the necessary resources.

3.5 People's responsibilities within a safety culture

A Safety Authority is commonly appointed to take on the role of initiating, implementing, and maintaining an organisation's safety culture and its safety policy.

Everyone within an organisation, from the board of directors down, is responsible for understanding the importance of safety, following the safety policy, and incorporating it into their everyday activities.

Roles and responsibilities for specific activities within ESM are described in chapter 2.

3.6 Putting safety policy into practice

The board of directors of an organisation should ensure that:

- there is management commitment to following the safety policy;
- everyone in the organisation is aware of the importance of following the safety policy;
- the necessary training and resources are provided;
- the way that the organisation performs ESM is monitored and improved;
- the safety of the organisation's products is monitored and improved;
- the organisation is regularly audited to assess its performance with regard to safety.

Awareness is a key factor in the successful implementation of safety policy. Everyone in the organisation should be aware of the importance of safety and of the organisation's safety policy. The methods for achieving this will vary according to the size and type of the organisation. It may be possible with smaller organisations to provide direct briefing of the safety policy. With larger organisations, cascade briefing may be more practical.

Management should put in place procedures to implement the key components of safety policy. Resources for ensuring successful implementation of safety policy should be made available. This will include personnel with suitable background and training, as well as equipment.

Management should provide the opportunity and motivation to all staff to improve the safety of their work.

3.7 How to monitor safety policy

Management should check that the safety policy is being implemented. Typically this will be done with a rolling program which ensures that every aspect of the policy is monitored over a period of a few years.

Typically an aspect of the safety policy is monitored on a random selection from all the relevant activities of the organisation. In some cases it may be sufficient to carry out a simple inspection of these activities. In other cases it may be appropriate to commission a formal audit. The guidance on safety auditing in chapter 14 may be used as a basis for such an audit.

Management should check that the findings of inspections and audits are acted upon.

The way in which the safety policy is implemented should be regularly reviewed to check that it is consistent with good practice which evolves over time.

Management should provide an environment in which staff feel able to bring safety shortcomings to management attention without fear of recriminations.

3.8 Related guidance

Roles and responsibilities for specific activities within ESM are described in chapter 2.

Guidance on safety auditing is provided in chapter 14.

Some example safety policies are presented in Appendix D.