

How to Plan and Run a Successful Hand & Finger Safety Program

10 January 2019

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The original intention in creating this document was to provide safety officers/managers with a dynamic and engaging Hand & Finger Safety Program which could be followed step by step to change worker behaviours and impress bosses. But it soon became obvious that because every workplace is different and every safety officer has different experience and skills, there can be no “one size fits all” solution. **The most effective Hand & Finger Safety Programs are all custom made.** So this document describes six steps any workplace can follow to create the best Hand & Finger Safety Program for THEM.

Whether you need to run a program in response to incidents at your workplace, or you want to stay ahead of serious issues, the steps you take to successfully plan and run it are the same:

1. Identify all the relevant issues and all possible causes of incidents/injuries (actual or possible).

It is important to realise that the “obvious” cause of an injury/incident is not usually the only cause or the main issue. For example, the five most common causes of workplace hand injuries are:

- Not aware of the hazard or risk;
- Not taking the hazard or risk seriously;
- Disregard for Safety Procedures;
- Boredom (loss of focus);
- Distractions (loss of focus).

Did you notice that list does not include, “The worker is an idiot”?

But, in fact, each cause on the list is only the outworking of a deeper “cause”. That’s why it’s important to take it further and **ask WHY**. WHY was the worker not aware of the hazards or level of risk? Was it because he was not informed of it or did not understand the training? WHY was he not informed? **Keep asking WHY until you have a list of all contributing factors.**

Once you have done this try to prioritise them in order from which, if overcome, would provide the most immediate and effective difference in the workplace, to which would make the least difference to the outcome.

[Often, main contributing factors in incidents and injuries can be traced back to a weak safety culture in the workplace. This does not always mean that management are not serious about worker safety, but that the workers are not aware of their concern.]

Essentially, the contributing factors on your list will fall in two broad areas: **GENERAL ISSUES** related to workplace safety as a whole such as ignorance about hazard types, and individual’s rights/responsibilities under Government Health & Safety Legislation; and **SPECIFIC ISSUES** such as



RIGHT TYPE

RIGHT SIZE

GOOD CONDITION

Without 1·2·3
Do NOT Proceed

the wrong selection and use of safety gloves, and using hands instead of a tool. Usually both General and Specific issues are involved.

Even with the information you collect to this point, ideas for the Program will begin to form in your mind. But don't stop there.

2. Identify Possible Solutions

Generally, the solutions to the problems and issues will mean REMINDING workers about what they should already know, and/or EDUCATING them about what they might not know or might have forgotten.

[Remember that **just because a worker says they know something, doesn't mean they do**. This is why it is becoming common workplace practise that a new worker who may have on their CV/Resumé a qualification/ticket for an ability be required to demonstrate it. Not everyone with a high risk forklift licence is competent on a forklift. Not everyone with a welding ticket, scaffolding ticket, or work at height ticket in their pocket may have the necessary knowledge and skills required in your workplace.]

One of the most overlooked sources for identifying possible solutions to health and safety problems is the people who do the work. That is why in many parts of the world, "consultation" is being included in safety legislation. All this really means is to *ask people who have experience and knowledge in the areas, to provide their input*. It doesn't mean you have to follow everything people say, but you might be surprised at the helpful ideas they come up with if given the chance. (If workers are not being asked for their input, or are not willing to give it, it could be a sign of a weak safety culture. Often, just asking for their input goes a long way to improving culture.)

To get their input, simply explain the problems and ask for ideas to fix them.

The solutions in your Program will ideally cover various aspects of:

- Hazard Identification;
- Control Evaluation;
- Risk Assessment;
- Awareness Training;
- Procedures/Skills Training.

3. Investigate Possible Resources

(Finding the most practical and effective ways to provide the solutions.)

Be wary about simply doing what you have always done, especially if what you have always done didn't achieve the results you needed. For example, if you have shown a certain safety video in the past to deal with an issue but the issue is still widespread, it makes sense to try something else instead or as well. Or, maybe you could keep showing the video over and over all through the workplace day in and day out, and eventually jokingly threaten that the video will continue until behaviour changes?

Generally though, the most effective resources to reach workers on safety issues are those that grab their imagination and emotions. And, because people respond differently to various forms of communication, it is

important to use a variety of methods at the same time.

Your goal is to overpower them with the message from every practical direction – tool box talks, safety meetings, email notifications, stickers, posters, signs, video presentations, and THINGS, etc.

In selecting THINGS, always be sure they are **pertinent** to the issue/s but also **valuable to the workers** because they are unusual or funny or useful – something they WANT to put on social media or take home or talk about with their friends.

Be creative with your resources. Whether you have a small or large budget for the Program, creativity will always stretch the budget further because it breaks through barriers and holds a position in the mind longer than bland or typical approaches. **In other words, no matter what resources you finally go with, there is one attribute they ALL need to have in common – NOT BE BORING.**

Boring resources almost guarantee wasted effort because boring is so quickly forgotten. For example, most people don't like being lectured at. All they hear is "blah, blah, blah, blah, blah". When something is BORING, 98% or more of the content will be forgotten in a week or less. Rather, try to engage your audience. **This means you need to know them.**

It's crucial that you find out how they see things and how they think. If you're not able to personally interact with the workers, talk to the people who do. (Another example of consultation.)

While we are talking about how to speak to workers, you will generally find it more effective to tell people what TO DO, not what NOT TO DO. Or at least if you are going to say what not to do, also say what to do. *Drive Safely – Don't Drink and Drive. Don't Use Damaged Tools – Take Any Damaged Tool to Your Supervisor for Exchange.* And if you can, include the reason: *So you arrive home safely. So you still have fingers to tickle your kids. So you avoid months of extreme pain and a life time of regret.* (Note that successful advertising works by highlighting the Benefits you'll get, and/or the Pain you'll avoid by buying the product or service.)

Quite often, the safety issues in a workplace are related to basic principles such as Identifying Hazards, Reporting Near Misses, and Duties & Responsibilities of Workers (and Management). So, you might need to start your Program on the general, broader issues, and then refine them, especially if your workplace hasn't done a general safety program before or your workplace has a weak safety culture.

Here are examples from Promote Safety of General Safety Posters:





You'll notice that the look and content of the posters are designed to attract and engage workers. This is done through strong and unusual graphics that grab attention, and occasionally through humour. Also note that posters with less text are useful for engaging workers who do not have English as their primary language. (Promote Safety posters are available in both UK and USA spelling.)

Once the general issues of safety are covered, start introducing resources aimed at specific issues such as Guarding, Damaged or Inappropriate Tools, LOTO, and PPE. When using EDUCATING based posters (usually with more text) it helps to place them where workers have to wait so they have time to read them. REMINDING posters (with minimal text) that simply move the issue to top of mind can be placed anywhere they will be noticed.

Here are examples of posters dealing with Specific Safety Issues:



4. Make a Program Plan

By this Step you should have a sizable bundle of helpful information and possible ways to most effectively communicate to workers your safety message so they can avoid or minimise risks, injuries and incidents.

It helps if you list your goals at the top of your Plan – what exactly do you want to happen in your workplace as a result of the Program – Generally and Specifically? Put them in order from most vital to least vital.

You might choose to name your Program. Often the main goal/s will suggest the best name. But here are examples: “Happy Hands” (Similar to Jazz Hands), “Count to 10”, “Irreplaceable”, “HAND SAFE” (Tattoo across knuckles), or “10 REASONS...” (...to LOTO; ...to Wear Safety Gloves; ...to Follow Procedures; etc.). Or you might be best to make it an event such as Hand Safety Month. Either way, you will find it helpful to have a graphic to represent the Program – something workers will associate with it and immediately tie in new resources with it.

For an article on Slogans find this link on the Promote Safety web site Home Page.

ARTICLE

Do Safety Slogans Really Help Keep Workers Safe?



Here are some graphics you might want to use or adapt. They, and others, are available for free from the Promote Safety web site.



After you have determined your goal/s, select the best of your information and ideas that will get you there. To transform it all into a Program Plan arrange the elements in some order or sequence which grows and develops from the introduction until all the aspects are suitably covered and the end reached.

Your Plan (of attack) should include where resources will be used, how long they will be used, and what they will be used in conjunction with.

Keep in mind that first you will have to overcome the stationary inertia of not having a Program, and then maintain energy input to keep it going until the target is achieved. Starting and stopping, starting and stopping, requires excessive amounts of energy, time and money.

As in all aspects of Workplace Health & Safety, any haphazard approach will run out of momentum and your Program will miscarry.

Remember to also include in the Plan how you will monitor and evaluate it.

5. Initiate the Plan

To overcome inertia, your Program will benefit from a LAUNCH EVENT to kick it off, spike interest, and hopefully get everyone on the same page and headed in the same direction. Of course the Launch doesn't have to be anything spectacular, maybe just a roll out of new PPE with the Program Slogan/Graphic on it. You could do a "Show Bag" full of fun and interesting items related to hands and fingers (maybe free samples from suppliers).

For more ideas see the Resource Suggestions and Ideas section below. (Be sure you look at the Drama idea.)

6. Keep Momentum (During and After the Program)

If you have acquired/developed strong and creative Resources, and have planned carefully, the Program will come "alive" and produce its own momentum as the elements of the Program synergise to engage and inspire workers.

To help with the momentum, **be on the lookout for current related incidents** in other workplaces and in your workplace, which you can use to highlight the reality and personal costs and benefits associated with the Program. (Many Health & Safety Regulators around the world provide free newsletters and alerts that cover recent incidents. Ideally though, use the ones from your own region and country – they tend to hit home to your workers better.)

Also, be sure to frequently check on Resources, and replace any damaged or missing ones. **Don't stress if workers graffiti posters or signs**; this can provide you with an insight into how the Program is affecting them and, if it is funny, might be used by you to enhance momentum.

Keeping Momentum should include a way of measuring how it's going. How much are people talking about it? Have near miss reports increased? Are more tools and PPE being ordered? etc.

If your Program is successful you should be able to continue the momentum long after it is officially complete. If you have succeeded in making a slogan or other aspect of the Program part of the psyche of the workers, simply mentioning or displaying it will bring it back to life.

Resource Suggestions and Ideas

Safety Posters

Safety Posters are always more effective when they are part of a Program rather than as a stand alone resource. Note too that if not changed regularly, workers quickly become "blind" to them, just as they do with safety signs. Other things that can make a difference to the effectiveness of Safety Posters is placement and size – consider where workers will see them – are they easy to read from the workers' viewpoint? Will they have time to read them if there is a lot of information? (Elevators can be a good location.)

For a helpful article on using Safety Posters, click this link on the Promote Safety web site Home Page.

ARTICLE

7 Top Tips when using Health & Safety Posters



Here are more designs from Promote Safety that might be useful to you:



Note that if you have an idea for a poster, Promote Safety can create it for you. If it is a design that could help others, we will do the artwork for free. And to thank you for the idea we will include your logo on your order. (Conditions may apply.)

Testimonials from co-workers who have had hand injuries or near misses can lead to discussions about how it could have been avoided. “Learn from my mistake”. This could be done with posters, at safety meetings, or short videos (if done well). Always try to include personal and emotional aspects of the incident e.g., pain, fear, grief, frustration, guilt.

Human Analogue Demonstrations

There is much debate among Health & Safety Professionals and workers about whether gruesome photos and videos of serious injuries should be used. Those for it, say it helps workers “feel” the consequence of unsafe actions. Those opposed to it, say it’s macabre and can initiate anxiety in workers, or make them insensitive to the seriousness of injuries. (Why not ask the workers in your workplace what they think? It could be a useful way to introduce or address relevant hazards in your workplace.)

One way to avoid the controversy is to use human analogues to

demonstrate the injuries. For example, to demonstrate the importance of avoiding “**Line of Fire**” (e.g., pinch hazards and crush hazards), place a sheep shank, pig trotter, or chicken leg in the “danger zone” and show what happens when the energy is released. Even though there is no blood, it is easy to imagine if that was your hand or finger.

[An analogue can also be an effective way to show the importance of not standing near a forklift. Even if you put the analogue in a steel capped boot and run over it with the forklift, it will successfully demonstrate the consequence. A reliable analogue for a human head is a watermelon – dropping a tool on it from height gives a strong image for why workers should wear hard hats.]

- **Printed workwear and PPE.** Program graphic or slogan printed on PPE such as gloves or HiVis vests or other workwear provided by the company. The message on gloves could be to replace them when worn, or RIGHT TYPE – RIGHT FIT – RIGHT CONDITION.

- **Printed “promotional” products.** Be sure they are relevant, creative and valuable (not necessarily valuable in price but in uniqueness and appeal) so workers want to hold onto them and show others. E.g., Thumb drive inside severed thumb; temporary tattoos such as HAND SAFE for fingers, or graphics for hand; strong magnets for white boards or fridges.



Image from Amazon.com

- **Object Lesson Activity.** Immobilise a volunteer’s dominant hand and ask them to do various simple tasks such as doing up buttons or shoelaces, or common tasks in their job.

- **Printed pictures** of real fingers and hands cut out and placed in places where injuries are possible. (Can use fake rubber ones instead.) Just be sure to have attached or printed on the back a relevant message.

- **Small posters** for small areas such as toilet cubicles. (Remember that if workers graffiti them it allows you to see into the minds of some of your workers.)

There are some free A5 size posters on the Promote Safety web site.

- **Stickers** to go on anything workers will have near them during their shift e.g., tool boxes, helmets, vehicle dash boards or windows, above urinals, and on tables in the lunch room.

- **Awards** (E.g., Golden finger/hand – “Flipping the bird” to hazards). Maybe special parking spot for the month with sign saying SAFETY AWARD WINNER PARKING (even paint the spot a specific colour). Maybe the CEO could give up their spot for a week? Ideally, there should be a choice of prizes to match the different types of workers such as drinkers/non-drinkers, family/married/single, older/younger, male/female. One person might like tickets to the zoo but others might prefer tickets to an amusement park. One person might like two nights in a classy hotel, but others might prefer a 4WD bush trip.

- **Drama** (Injury investigation related to a high risk, specific and ongoing issue which is being ignored by workers.) When workers turn up for their shift have a section cordoned off as if there has been a serious incident.

Get the workers into a meeting room to discuss. Mention a certain person was injured and has been taken to hospital (or is in the first aid room with a “bloodied” towel wrapped around their hand, and waiting for the ambulance).

Explain how you believe it happened even though the procedures were in place to prevent it. Ask if others have had near misses with it and if other workers have been doing the same risky activity. Tell the group that you need to keep them there for a little while until an investigator from your local H&S Authority arrives to take statements and collect the evidence to see if there has been ongoing risk-taking by workers. Cover the legal consequences to workers who do unsafe work.

Possibly ask if they are aware of other risky behaviours that workers engage in that are contrary to safety rules and procedures (no need to name names). Write responses on white board. After 20-30 minutes announce that the investigator has arrived and is coming in – it is the person supposedly injured.

If you think this could be suitable for your workplace, be sure to keep the proceedings as calm as possible otherwise you might have to provide trauma counselling for some workers.

• **Promote Safety Resources.** See the last page of this document for some options for cards, magnets or stickers. There are also many other resources related to hand/finger safety on the Promote Safety web site including plenty of free ones such as the graphics in this document and more. (If you need different file formats just email Promote Safety.)

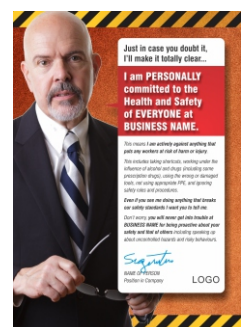
Promote Safety can also help you with requests for new Graphics and Poster Designs especially if they might help other workplaces with the same issues.

Improving Safety Culture (Suggestions for Management)

As with all workplace safety programs, the effectiveness in reducing injuries and incidents tends to be in direct proportion to the support and involvement of supervisors and management. Ideally then, any effective safety program must begin with ensuring and emphasizing that the workers can rely on a solid management foundation regarding safety.

To do this, management need to be openly and pro-actively involved – simply “talking the talk” is not enough. This could be done with messages directly from the top bosses proclaiming their commitment. It could be face-to-face at safety meetings and tool box talks, via posters or even by short videos. **The effort and time required to make an impact on safety culture will depend on the current view workers have of the safety culture, and the experiences they have had at other workplaces.**

• Posters picturing the General Manager, CEO, Managing Director, and Heads of Departments proclaiming their personal commitment (not just that of the workplace H&S policy). Photos of the bosses should honestly



represent their character. For example, when a Prime Minister or President of a country does a presentation without suit and tie, and has their sleeves rolled up, everyone knows they are trying to con people into believing that they are everyday working class folk like them.

- Management occasional, yet random, involvement at tool box talks and other safety related meetings. Ideally workers get to feel comfortable around the bosses so that they feel safe raising issues.
- Management ALWAYS following safety rules and procedures, e.g., mandatory PPE where indicated.
- Management randomly at the “coal face” observing and interacting with workers about what the risks are and how they are controlled, and what they think could be improved especially if they have seen things working better in previous workplaces.
- Head of large workplace can be an *Undercover Boss* – a “newby” on the site who needs training.

Obviously, senior management rarely have a lot of spare time to do such things, which is exactly why it should be scheduled in at least once a week if possible. Even if upper management can't get to everyone, they need to develop opportunities for “transferred trust” (any worker with social influence in the workplace who learns to trust the genuineness of the bosses and the safety culture, will influence other workers).

Add Your Ideas to this Article

This article is a work in progress. So if this has helped you and inspired a successful Hand & Finger Safety Program, please let us know what creative resources you discovered or developed so they can be added to the content.

