EIGA Human Safety Factors Information

Prepared by the Safety Advisory Group Safety Info HF 07/09

Organisation

Communications on Safety

As a starting point for examining your company's communications, you should consider the different methods that companies use to communicate safety information and how these communications could affect safety. They may include:

General safety communications: Notices, warning signs, posters, memos, 'non-verbal' communications (e.g. gestures, hand signals), the manager visiting the workplace;

- All communicate a message about the company's safety culture.

Specific safety communications: communication with outside groups e.g. to pass on and to receive information on lessons learned; communication of actions taken after accidents, audits and risk assessments; responsibilities in job descriptions.

Safety meetings and the records of those meetings if they are distributed afterwards

Job-specific communications: job briefings, 'toolbox talks' and written instructions or procedures with information focussed on job hazards and safety precautions needed. Discussions within teams and between teams (e.g. between team members working on the same job; between operations and maintenance teams, when handing over work from one shift to another). Job briefings before non routine work is carried out, as part of the issue of safe work permits or confined space entry permits etc.

Informal communications: general discussions and interactions between employees, supervisors and managers, where these include safety issues

Emergency communications – alarms, PA messages, briefings, communication with emergency services.

Communications are basically 'messages'. A message has to be created, sent and then received.
There could be problems at any of these stages which may mean that the intended receiver of the message fails to take the right action.

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Learning more about communications on safety.

If the answer to any of the questions below is 'no', then you need to take action

	Questions about Management communications:
1.	Is there a process to select the key information to be communicated?
2.	Is there a system to communicate changes in practice and lessons following an incident?
3.	Does a process exist to monitor the effectiveness of the communication of major hazard information?
4.	Is the workforce actively involved in communications (i.e. not just passive receivers of information)?
5.	Is there a process to ensure that modifications, changes to processes, procedures, systems and organisation are communicated to all relevant staff?
6.	Have communications been considered in defining the plant's safety command and control structure?
7.	Are there routes by which operators can raise safety concerns with management and is the loop then closed adequately?
8.	Is there a process to review the communications routes following plant /organisational change?
9.	Are the key communication aspects of critical procedures assured?
10.	Is there a defined structure for shift handover arrangements?
11	Has the company implemented effective ways to communicate relevant major hazard information to contractors, temporary staff and visitors?
	Questions about communication with Operators:
1.	Is there evidence that the key major hazard information has been understood by the target audience (i.e. staff, contractors, visitors)?
2.	Is there evidence that changes to practices, as a result of an incident, are understood by staff?
3.	Is there an audit trail documenting the monitoring process?
4.	Is there evidence that key communication channels are documented?
5.	Do operators know when to report safety concerns?
6.	Do operators understand where they can obtain key safety information?
7.	Can staff describe the safety implications of any recent changes to the plant?

What can go wrong?

Unreliable communications can result from a variety of problems including:

- missing information;
- unnecessary information;
- inaccurate information;
- poor or variable quality of information;
- misunderstandings; and
- failing to carry forward information over successive shifts.

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What can we do about it?

Understanding communication

Much of human factors is about communication. It is clear that accurate and timely communications are important for safety and efficiency in work. To perform a specific task, an operator will need to know what to do.

Part of the process of selecting personnel is an interview in which existing skills and experience will be discussed. This is a communication process exploring the skills and knowledge that potential employees and contractors already have.

Training is a form of communication. First, it involves finding out what training is required, then passing new information to personnel to improve their skills and knowledge.

When work starts, specific issues about each job should be described in tool-box talks and in the procedures used. Both should emphasise health and safety issues.

In the workplace, displays, signs and labels communicate factual and safety information.

Many operators will need to use technology, i.e. radios, phones or intercoms, to contact others.

Problems arising in the workplace will need to be communicated via a reporting system.

All of these are communication issues: they are also human factors issues.

What can Managers do about it?

Management should ensure that it has control over all aspects of communications in the workplace. If information is not being sent, received, understood or acted on, the company should investigate and remove any barriers to communication.

To do this, management must have systems in place for monitoring and auditing communications.

Managers should ensure that:

- Managers and supervisors regularly discuss safety with employees face to face
- Formal safety information: posters, memos, newsletters, talks and presentations are:
  - clear and easy to understand
  - short and to-the-point
  - regularly updated.
- Jobs are scheduled so that there is time to communicate properly.
- Communications equipment – such as radios, intercoms, PA, internal email – are fit for purpose
- Excessive background noise in the workplace does not interfere with critical speech communications.
- Systems are in place to check that safety-critical information has been received and understood. (e.g. logbooks)
- There is a specific focus on good communications at shift handover.
- Systems of good communication are in place during unusual situations or

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emergencies.

- Different groups – operations and maintenance staff, employees and contractors – communicate well with each other.
- Employees understand the communication needs of all tasks they are required to carry out - whether normal operations, maintenance, fault or emergency tasks.
- Employees are regularly trained and assessed in all communications procedures (e.g. terminology used; hand signals, how to use communication equipment and computer based information)
- Employees are able to contact supervisors or managers at any time ('open door' policy) and have the means to report problems and receive feedback in good time
- Employees see managers and supervisors on site demonstrating their commitment to work quality and safety.

Shift handovers

Management should ensure that:

- Where possible, tasks are scheduled to be completed within a shift so that there is no need for handover
- Clear procedures or written guidance are in place describing the key information to be exchanged and how this should be done (e.g. word of mouth, in writing or both)
- Handovers are face-to-face wherever possible allowing crews to question each other
- Handovers are not distracted e.g. by time pressure
- Handover procedures take into account higher risk periods, e.g. lengthy maintenance campaigns, after long periods of absence,
- Handover procedures take into account periods where safety systems are overridden, e.g. start-up of continuously operating plant, during unscheduled maintenance, or live safety critical permit to work
- Employees are competent to use handover procedures
- Regular and thorough monitoring and auditing is conducted
- Employees who conduct handovers are involved in the examination and improvement of these shift handover practices
- Information from incidents and accidents due to shift handover problems are brought to the attention of employees.

Improving Communication

A number of simple steps can improve communications in the workplace:

- Carefully specify what key information needs to be communicated;
- Aim to cut out the transmission of unnecessary information;
- Use aids (such as logs, computer displays) based on the key information needs

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to help accurate communication;

- Aim to repeat the key information using different mediums, e.g. use both written and verbal communication;
- Allow sufficient time for communication, particularly at shift handover;
- Encourage two-way communication with both the giver and recipient of the information taking responsibility for accurate communication;
- Encourage the asking of confirmation, clarification and repetition;
- Encourage face-to-face communication wherever feasible;
- Try to develop the communication skills of all employees; and
- Aim to set standards for effective and safe communication.

Useful Reference Information

1. Institute of Petroleum, Communications, Human Factors Briefing Notes No 10, 2003.
2. Health and Safety Executive, Safety-Critical Communications, HSE Human Factors Briefing Note No 8.
3. Health and Safety Executive, HSE Human Factors Toolkit, June 2004.
4. Health and Safety Executive, Reducing Error and Influencing Behaviour, HSG48, 2007, HSE Books ISBN 978-0-7176-2452-2
5. EIGA, Design and Effectiveness of Procedures, Human Factors Safety Information Sheet 04/09

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