

Transform health & safety effectiveness with digital



Every organisation must put robust processes in place to meet health and safety requirements. Yet, explains Michael McCullen, chairman, Sitedesk, it is often only when something goes wrong that H&S policies and procedures are truly put to the test.

It is incumbent on all employers to make sure that risk assessments are carried out for all types of activity.

They must ensure they produce written H&S processes and method statements, and that these are complied with. Staff training is essential, along with certification, wherever appropriate – and the entire system must be continually reviewed and improved.

Health and safety is often derided as getting in the way of ‘good, old fashioned’ working practices – yet its aim is laudable: to protect employees who are potentially risking life and limb in the performance of their everyday duties. Ultimately it protects organisations too, the very future of which can be in jeopardy if found negligent.

Employers must not only devise procedures but assure an audit trail, proving that appropriate information has been provided to operatives and that employees have confirmed their understanding of how things should be done. In any future claim, employers must prove they have taken all possible steps to identify and mitigate risks.

Getting this wrong could be catastrophic. Corporate manslaughter is a criminal offence carrying potential prison sentences and massive fines. Executives could live with the knowledge they have allowed someone to be injured or killed. They may damage their own, and

the company’s, reputation – as well as expose it to costs of delay or liquidated and ascertained damages (LADs).

Construction and FM firms both face significant H&S challenges. Considerations can start well before work on site or contract begins. For example:

- How will a construction site be set up?
- How will staff comforts be provided?
- How will plant and materials be delivered, then operate?
- How will work be coordinated to minimise risk?
- How will this be communicated?
- How will all parties confirm their understanding?
- Are you certain subcontracted staff are competent?
- Are there high voltage cables overhead or underground?
- Unsafe buildings nearby?
- What about public safety?

For FM service providers, their operatives must be similarly prepared: maintenance of any industrial or commercial site can carry H&S risks – ranging from working with electrical or heavy plant, at height or lone working, to mention but a few.

The system to be used to record all this intelligence is a key consideration, as well as how information will be disseminated. Many businesses still rely on paper systems for employee briefings and acceptance – but paper is often misfiled, or even never filed at all. Inspectors know that paper is too easy to falsify, alter, or post-date after an incident.

The emergence of digital tools is changing the way that such information is captured, recorded, disseminated and verified – and the benefits go far beyond simply storing information in a database rather than the site office filing



cabinet. Site briefings or FM briefings post-completion can now be conducted using a 3D model. On the building site it can illustrate layouts, material stores, work areas, and the location of dangerous materials and equipment in a powerful and memorable way that is impossible with 2D drawings. Escape routes can be shown more clearly, and 3D walkthroughs help teams familiarise and orient.

Finding relevant paperwork can take hours – but H&S documentation can now be linked directly to that 3D model and quickly found simply by clicking on the work location. SaaS (Software as a Service) can make this easily and quickly accessible on site via a tablet. Users can confirm receipt and understanding of instructions on their own devices. Meanwhile, new risks identified on site can be captured on video or in photos and recorded in the same system – keeping H&S data current.

It is easy to see why digital tools are becoming more popular, since they make the role of health and safety more visible and instantly accessible on site or in the field, allowing a contemporaneous record to be kept along with the vital audit trail. Digital records cannot be altered without this forming part of the audit trail – reducing any fraud or collusion. Such systems also have the added benefit of producing a complete as-built record of a building project for final handover, which can provide a powerful foundation for FM and ongoing health and safety management.

Smart companies ensure they have not only H&S policies but systems to ensure they can be quickly and easily accessed, becoming a more natural and integral part of operations. Doing so can help to foster a safer culture which involves employees to identify and record risk and its mitigation. Whether this is done with paper or digitally, organising and putting information at your fingertips is critical. The value will be immediate and significant, should you ever have to defend a claim or answer H&S investigator questions.

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