

LIFTING WORKER ENGAGEMENT

Worker participation is at the heart of SafePlus, the H&S performance improvement toolkit. We outline SafePlus and get insights from an independent, accredited SafePlus assessor about how it has delivered value for his clients.

SafePlus enables an assessment of health and safety performance by engaging with people from right across the organisation. It explores how the business is led, how risks are managed and how workers are engaged in health and safety – through their experience with the work they do.

The design and development of SafePlus was guided by an expert group of health and safety practitioners, who researched widely for common characteristics of good performance.

Businesses that take part in a SafePlus assessment gain a view of their current health and safety performance – both its strengths and challenges. They also get links to advice and guidance about how they could go about making improvements in their lowest-scoring performance areas.

SafePlus is available in two formats: an on-site assessment and advisory service, delivered by independent, accredited SafePlus assessors; and the free-to-use online self-assessment tool, which uses the same assessment framework but without a SafePlus assessor. There are also resources on WorkSafe's website, explaining the SafePlus performance requirements.

NOT AN AUDIT

SafePlus isn't a health and safety compliance tool or an audit. It's optional for businesses and is intended to support a focus on continuous improvement by recognising what is going well, and areas for improvement, and seeking to encourage reflection and participation in health and safety, with businesses and their workers taking responsibility for each other.

Two areas of SafePlus highlight how it's set up to support engaging with workers about health and safety – and the value of doing so.

A health and safety audit will typically assess policies, systems and processes in place, look for deficits between these and what's needed to meet a standard, and then identify corrective actions.

SafePlus can help to provide insight about the underlying reasons why something is or isn't working, through behaviour-focused conversations. Also, the assessment process has a clear focus on highlighting – and sharing across the business – the aspects of its health and safety that are working well.

CONVERSATIONS KEY

Both the on-site and online SafePlus options are designed to enable conversations, drawing on the views and experience of the workers within each organisation,

to understand how systems and processes are working for them 'on the ground' – what's going well and where improvements could be made. SafePlus assessor Greg Dearsly has seen the benefits of this approach first-hand:

"Many of the SafePlus assessments I've done have been with organisations struggling with their performance. People often know what their key health and safety issues are and have some idea how to solve them. The SafePlus assessment helps with insight and enables action to follow."

Through conversation, Greg says, it's not unusual in a SafePlus assessment to find that what the leaders in a business thought were the big issues were only symptoms of something else.

"Conversations I've had with people right across organisations – whether workers, reps, or senior or middle managers – typically result in very open and honest discussions about their experiences in health and safety. That's incredibly valuable to the business, revealing where things aren't working quite as well as it thought – and for building trust."

BUILDING PARTICIPATION

Exploring and sharing the collective knowledge of people in a business is designed to grow

participation, says Greg. The SafePlus report template that assessors use includes a worker summary, with the intention that it's displayed for workers post-assessment.

"One of the best pieces of feedback I've had from an assessment was an employee telling me his fellow workers felt they were being listened to. I've seen that make a difference time and again.

"When I've made recommendations around worker engagement practices, they've led to improved approaches to this important aspect of being an employer. And when you have health and safety reps from businesses that have been assessed telling you about how their employer has changed its approach, and they've been elected by their peers rather than the business shoulder-tapping someone, you can see how SafePlus can support building trust and energising participation."

The SafePlus toolkit was developed by WorkSafe New Zealand, ACC and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) to help improve workplace health and safety in New Zealand beyond minimum legal compliance.

For more about SafePlus, including a listing of accredited assessors, visit safeplus.nz