

Health and Safety: Fit for the Future

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1. Introduction

The Highways Agency, a UK Government Agency with responsibility for the managed road network in England, became a company in April 2015. As part of a wider programme of work to create a high performing organisation, health, safety and wellbeing was targeted as an area for improvement. A project was conceived to focus on a vision for the future. This project, health and safety: fit for the future, was designed to provide a road map to produce an organisation that was excellent at health, safety and wellbeing.

The project had five stages. These were a literature search, a series of interviews with senior personnel in “similar” organisations, a series of stakeholder engagement workshops and leadership exercises, the production of an initial strategy, then finally, the delivery of a 5-year plan.

2. Method

Our approach was to collect evidence on how to drive behaviours at an organisational level, at a manager level and at an individual level. We also needed to identify methods of engaging with all key stakeholders and to drive their behaviours, including Highways England contractors, road users and enforcement bodies.

Literature search – we explored how to achieve a more effective health and safety management system. We examined what delivered the desired behaviour changes. The main findings were that organisations that claimed to be world-class at health and safety do not have a common approach or agreed metrics for what good looks like. However, they have an explicit commitment to “good”, normally in the form of core values that describe behaviours of individuals in any circumstance.

Interviews with organisations - high performing organisations were interviewed to determine how they achieved effective health and safety performance. It became clear that organisations had effective strategies for stakeholder engagement, training, and an understanding of the importance of lead indicators that measured more than traditional factors such as lost time injuries and accidents.

Stakeholder engagement and leadership - we conducted extensive interviews with the representatives at all levels within the Highways Agency. We also interviewed the whole senior leadership team to explore what they wanted out of a new health and safety strategy and how they thought we could achieve this. We categorised the vision of the senior leadership team into 8 areas:

1. **Ambition** – setting clear vision and values for health and safety that were both internal facing (i.e. for employees) and external facing (for everyone affected by the new company’s undertaking).
2. **Culture and climate** – the need to employ techniques to measure and improve the health and safety culture and climate.

3. **Governance** – the importance of delivering effective governance of health and safety to demonstrate that the management system was effective and delivering the required improvements.
4. **Risk** – the need to have a single, corporate view on risk that allowed for risks to be assessed, reduced and monitored, and the importance of linking risk management to governance procedures.
5. **Whole life safety** – the need to understand that decisions taking early in project life cycles will have impacts throughout a project and beyond.
6. **Health and wellbeing** – an emphasis on more than just safety is a key component of any effective management system.
7. **Assurance** – three-tier audits, at the local, tactical and strategic levels are required to assure the senior team that the system is functioning.
8. **Performance monitoring** – taking a more innovative and proactive approach to measuring performance whilst recognising that reactive statistics needed to be captured and be decreasing.

3. Results

We designed an action-orientated strategy that was in line with the wish of the organisation to be fit for the future in terms of its management of health, safety and wellbeing. We also recognised the benefits of engaging with a wider audience, particularly the Tier 1 and Tier 2 contractors who deliver most of Highways England's projects, we ran a number of workshops outlining our aims and objectives and collected considerable feedback on how to improve the strategy.

The strategy was taken by the Health and Safety Director and incorporated into a 5-year plan for Highways England.