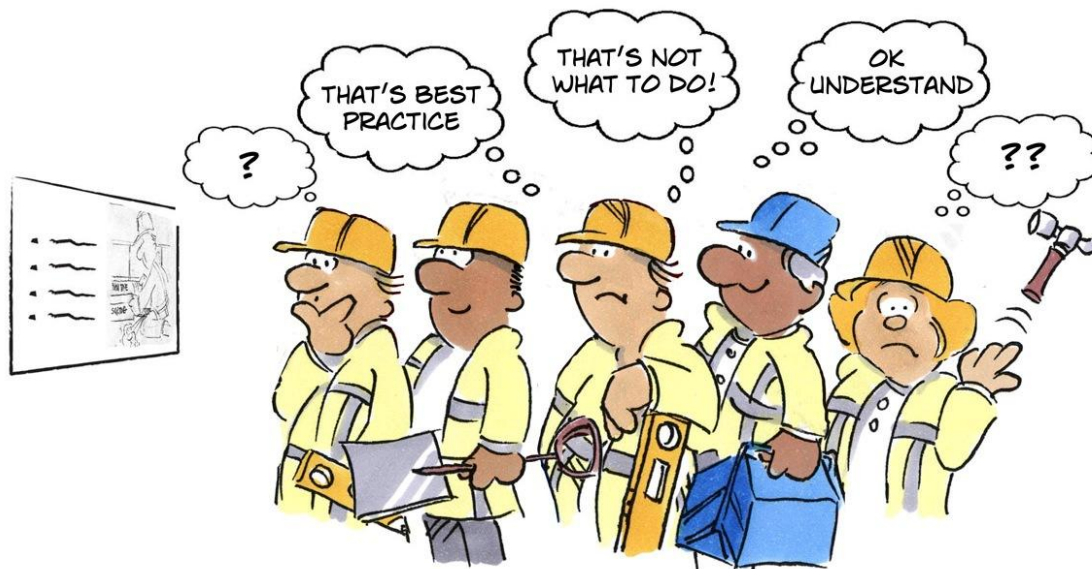


Effective health and safety communication

A guide for employers in the construction industry



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Section 1: About this guide

This guide is for those in the construction industry who need to communicate a health and safety message to their workforce, whether direct employees or working on site. Communicating effectively to a diverse workforce is not easy, but doing it well can have remarkable results. People who may find this guide useful include site managers, safety officers, foremen and directors.

This guide includes important points to take into account when communicating about health and safety, but it doesn't contain all the information to be considered. Further background material can be found in the appendix A.

The importance of involving the workforce cannot be underestimated. The Health and Safety Executive has numerous resources available to help with worker involvement - see <http://www.hse.gov.uk/involvement/research.htm>

Section 2: Planning effective health and safety communication to a diverse workforce

Effective communication is “the acceptance of the sender’s message by the receiver”. If the receiver understands the meaning of and responds appropriately to the message, the goal of the communication has been achieved.

Three key considerations when planning any health and safety communications activity are:

- a) *What is to be achieved from the communications activity and how will I measure success?*
- b) *What are my key messages?*
- c) *Who is my audience?*

a) *What is to be achieved from the communications activity and how will I measure success?*

- Be as clear as possible about what your aim is, and draw up some specific objectives.
- Do you want to pass on some important information, raise awareness, change behaviour, or all three?
- Ask yourself what differences you expect to see following the communication.
- If you have more than one objective, you might consider several distinct communication activities.
- From your objectives, decide your key messages.
- At the outset, decide how you will measure success. (The example below contains a measurable objective).

Example: Measuring success

Aim: I need to make everyone in the company aware of a new accident reporting procedure, and their new responsibilities. After the communication, they should carry out the task in a certain way.

Objective: When the activity is complete, people will use the AccR1 form accurately, and know who to send it to and by what time. [zero % error rate after 3 months].

b) What are my key messages?

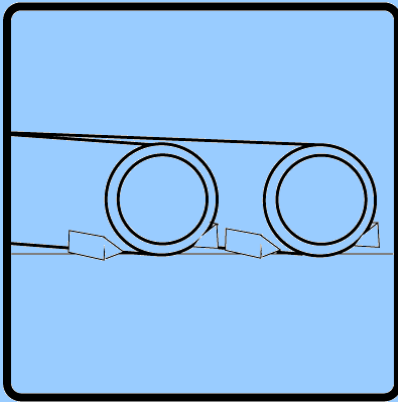
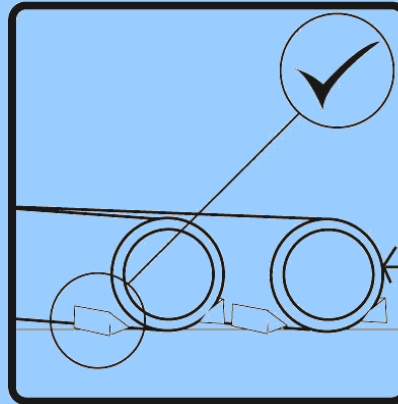
- When developing key messages, you need to reflect on what your audience will want to know. Are there any benefits to them in the situation or message that you can highlight? What's in it for them?
- Work out how to make an immediate impact.
- Your audience is more likely to engage with the message if they see the potential benefits for them.
- Be specific with key messages.
For example, "You must wear a hard hat in this area" is specific.
"Take care to avoid head injuries" is not.

c) Who makes up my audience?

Take some time to think about your audience – the people you are communicating to. It may be a group of very similar people, or a wide range of people with different cultural backgrounds, technical knowledge and literacy skills. Consider the following:

- How do they prefer to receive messages?
- What is the level of their existing knowledge; are they used to dealing with technical data?
- What are the literacy skills of the audience? (This may depend on your region and language: note that 20% of adults in the UK have some difficulty with reading and writing.)
- If your audience is diverse, you will probably need to deliver the same message in a variety of ways, such as face-to-face, written instructions, pictograms etc.
- The more personally relevant the message, the more impact it is likely to have.
- The more familiar a person is with a product or task, the less likely they are to look for, read, or comply with the information – "familiarity breeds complacency."
Therefore, if the same communication activity tends to be used regularly, it will need to be refreshed to keep it interesting and current.
- Pictograms are useful, particularly when communicating with a diverse group who may have difficulty understanding written text. However, care is needed to ensure that pictures cannot be misinterpreted (see example below).

▪

Example: Pictograms**A****B**

Concrete Pipes

What does this picture mean to you? And now? Has the meaning become clearer?

- The picture is meant to represent concrete pipes with stop chocks. It may not be clear from Picture 'A' what you are supposed to be looking at, and it could be misinterpreted. E.g. is it a conveyor belt. Picture 'B' highlights the message more clearly.

The delivery of any communications activity will depend on your key messages, as well as your audience.

Section 3: How to communicate effectively

Delivering the message

There are three main ways of communicating a message; verbally, in writing, or visually. Various types of communication activity are detailed in Appendix A, along with the advantages and disadvantages of each. This will help you determine the primary way of communication that would best suit the message.

Each activity should generally not be considered in isolation, as other types of activity could be used to supplement or support the main format. For example, posters and pictograms are good ways of reinforcing key verbal messages.

Presenting the message

- If you decide that the message needs to be delivered in person (e.g. a training session, presentation, toolbox talk.) then the 'presentation skills' of the presenter(s) who deliver it are critical.
- You need to consider what presentation skills and qualities are needed, what level of technical knowledge and credibility they will have with the recipients, and how this will be established.
- Should the presenters be external, or part of the existing team – for example an experienced worker or supervisor?
- A valid message delivered by the wrong person may have little or no impact.
- Beware of 'information overload' – don't bombard people with too much information; they may miss the key message.
- Be succinct, clear and to the point. Leave out jargon and technical detail unless essential (they can always ask for more information). Use commonly understood words, such as 'cut' instead of 'laceration'.
- Active language is preferred, e.g. "You must....."
- Present information in bite-sized chunks and use summaries to reinforce messages.

Written Information

When communicating in writing, the way in which the layout, font, spacing and colour is used will affect how the message is received. For example, this sentence is clear and easy to read. *However, this one is not because of poor font/spacing, etc.*

Translated material

If the workforce is diverse and speaks different languages, you may need some of your material translated, particularly when relying on written communication. Consider some of the following issues when using translated material:

- Translations can be expensive, particularly if your information needs to be updated regularly.
- Make sure your translation service covers all the relevant language groups.
- Avoid jargon. Some terms, phrases and concepts do not translate easily into other languages; even when translated, they may carry a different meaning. For example, the words 'plant and machinery' can have different meanings when translated into other languages.
- Narrative story-telling is common to many cultures, but the use of technical flowcharts / diagrams may cause confusion. Cartoons / pictures may be helpful, but may also be interpreted differently by people from other cultures.
- Plain language works for most groups.

If possible, use qualified translators who understand the industry. All translations should ideally be checked for clarity and accuracy by a native speaker before use.

Section 4: Feedback and follow-up

How will I know if my communication has been effective?

Build into your communication plan arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the particular means of communication used. This could be as simple as discussing it with a sample of the audience to determine if they identified and understood correctly the key messages being conveyed. Consider:

- Was it successful? Were all your objectives met?
- What worked, and what didn't?
- What would you do differently next time?
- Have you seen the changes in performance or behaviour you expected?

Section 5: Summary – top tips for effective communication

TOP 10 TIPS



for getting your message across

1. Clearly identify your aim/s.
2. Know what you want to achieve and set realistic, measureable objectives.
3. Decide what your messages will be.
4. Understand clearly who the message is for.
5. Consider using several different ways to communicate the same message.
6. Use Appendix 'A' to generate ideas and help select the best option for your audience.
7. Consider who should deliver it, and what credibility they have - a good message badly delivered is lost.
8. Consider whether the communication was effective. *(Never check understanding by simply asking – “do you understand?” You will almost always get a “yes” answer. It’s preferable to ask something like – “so how will you do the task now?”, or “what does this [the subject] mean for you?”)*
9. Plan your method of evaluating success before delivering the communication activity.
10. To communicate effectively, keep it simple; you only have about 30 seconds to capture someone’s attention, and will only keep it for about 20 minutes!

Appendix A: Advantages and disadvantages of different communication activities

(Note this is not an exhaustive list, but contains some main types of communication activity and links to sample material)

Type of communication activity	Advantages	Disadvantages	Example(s)
Written Instructions – including leaflets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can convey lots of information ▪ Very precise detail ▪ Provides permanent resource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can be too much information ▪ Relies on literacy of audience ▪ May rely on technical knowledge of reader ▪ Can become out-of-date ▪ Not interactive 	<p>http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/mdhs/pdfs/mdhs100.pdf</p> <p>http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/</p> <p>http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/safetymw.pdf</p>
Poster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visual ▪ Better if at point of risk ▪ Good way to combine text and pictures ▪ Good for reinforcing other messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very passive ▪ Limited space for message ▪ Not interactive ▪ May rely on literacy of audience 	<p>http://www.hse.gov.uk/shatteredlives/constructionint.pdf</p> <p>http://www.unitetheunion.com/member_services/health_and_safety/health_and_safety_resources/unite_health_and_safety_poster.aspx</p>
Classroom training seminar/event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interactive ▪ Can be adapted as necessary ▪ Allows questions to be asked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ May be difficult to cater for differences in: age, culture, language, existing knowledge ▪ Will depend significantly on the ability of the presenter 	<p>http://www.cilt.org.uk/workplace/employer_support/using_an_interpreter.aspx</p>
Desktop presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensures consistent message ▪ Low tech – can be delivered in any meeting room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relies on presenter skills ▪ Limited numbers 	<p>http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/induction.pdf</p>
Video/Web video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visual ▪ Engaging ▪ Still quite novel - so interesting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Requires necessary technology. ▪ Language / culture may be an 	<p>http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/campaign/video.htm</p> <p>http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsJ7Ev7jvpU&feature=related</p>

Type of communication activity	Advantages	Disadvantages	Example(s)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be hosted online – so accessible from almost anywhere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> issue Expensive 	
Podcast/Text (SMS) Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current Attractive to younger audience Moderate cost Can be offered in variety of languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relies on equipment and technological ability Relies on language ability Need to be aware of cultural differences Need to understand txt spk (text speak) 	http://www.hse.gov.uk/podcasts/2009/young-people.htm http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/talkingleaflets/indg347.mp3 http://www.rrc.co.uk/Podcasts.aspx http://www.webopedia.com/quick_ref/textmessageabbreviations.asp
Pictogram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn't rely on language Straightforward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can only relay very limited information Possibility of mis-interpretation. 	http://www.hse.gov.uk/falls/usingladders/sandoff.htm
Interactive Computer /Web Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can combine text and pictures Can be interactive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relies on equipment and technological ability 	http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/essential/building.htm http://www.ioshroutefinder.co.uk/
Toolbox talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivered in working environment (at the 'coal face') Risks are real – not theoretical Normally delivered by people with credibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to ensure consistency and quality Relies on spoken language comprehension 	http://www.hse.gov.uk/PUBNS/indg403.pdf
PowerPoint® presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good mix of text picture, video Allows for permanent record – handouts Allows questions to be asked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often passive Tired format Relies on skill and style of presenter to be effective 	http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/cdm/cdmppt.htm http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/cdm/session6.PPT