

N E W      A G E      S A F E T Y

SEMINARS FOR DIVISIONS IN THE NORTHERN REGION

1982

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING A SUCCESSFUL  
SAFETY CLIMATE IN NORTHERN REGION  
DIVISIONS

Notes for 1982 Training Seminars

by

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I INTRODUCTION

You will recall that in the Management Objectives for the Northern Region agreed to last year, we wrote that one of our most important tasks was:

Providing staff with goals, the opportunity to achieve them, feedback on performance and help, guidance, training and encouragement at all times.

In a nutshell, we agreed to practice good personnel management. And at the top of the list of areas where good personnel management is most desirable is the safety programme.

This is because safety has top priority in the Northern Region. We all agree that it would be intolerable if the people who work for us could not do so without suffering accidents or ill health on the job. With the labour force, as with the forest, we manage and conserve, we do not exploit.

Over the 15 years since the safety programme commenced we have made major strides in our safety understanding and skills. Our current accident record is the best-ever for the region. Even so, are we completely satisfied with current management?

Since accidents still occur, I think we can agree that our safety performance is not yet perfect and that further improvements can, and need to be made.

Therefore this seminar. What I would like to do is pick up the key points from the Geographe Bay schools and try to translate them to the local scene in each division.

## II OUR SAFETY AIM

The aim of the safety programme in the region can be simply stated:

To foster a safe working climate in the Northern Region.

"Foster" means to nurture and support. But what do we mean by a "safe working climate"?

Can the concept of safe working climate be defined, grasped and clarified to the point where we can nurture and support it? Let's see.

### 2. WHAT IS A SAFE WORKING CLIMATE

Safety climate is variously defined by the experts. Some of these definitions are hard to grasp because they are expressed as peoples' perceptions. In other words our safety climate may be said to be the qualities of our safety programme as perceived by our staff and employees.

By this definition, the safety climate is successful if it is thought to be successful by those involved. This is obviously correct, but is hard to grasp. The following definition may not be as strictly correct, but is easier to discuss:

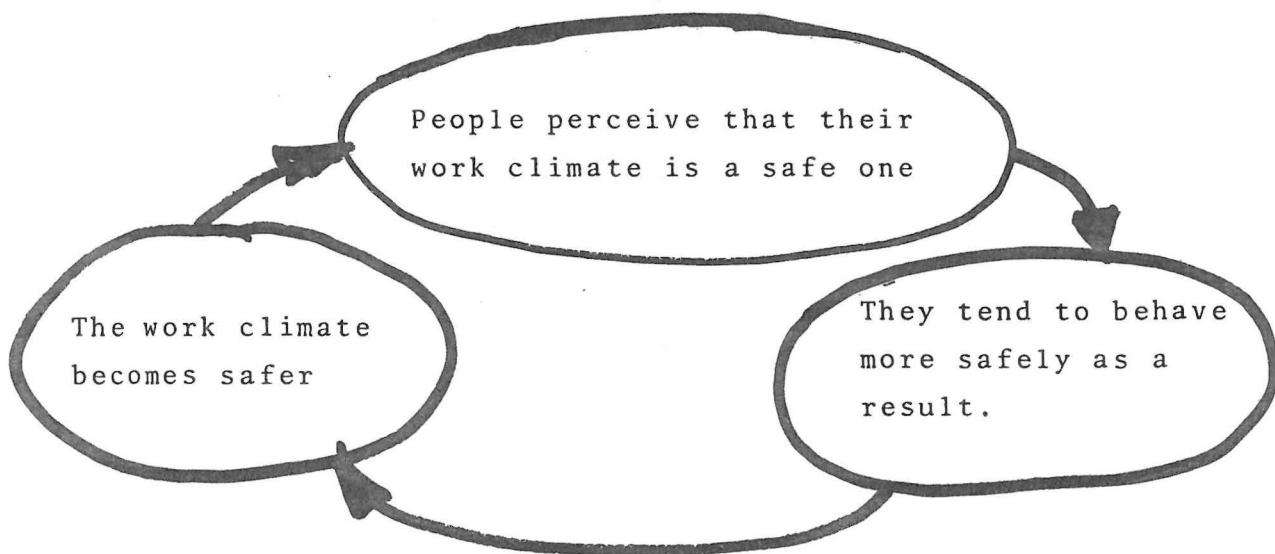
We have a safe working climate when work in divisions is seen to be planned and carried out so that our men and women are not injured on the job.

In seeking to build a safe working climate, we are seeking to influence our people's behaviour. We want them to behave safely on the job. People who behave safely do not suffer accidents.

The trick is that people are more likely to behave safely if they see themselves belonging to a division where safety is important and the safety programme is vigorous and effective.

You all know the old saying: "Nothing succeeds like success". People prefer to play in a winning side than a losing one, to work in a successful division than an unsuccessful one.

The cycle of events is as follows:



We now have to ask ourselves: how do we influence the people in our division to perceive that their work climate is a safe one?

I think the answers lie in two areas:

- (i) The image of ourselves as safety managers that we hold and project; and
- (ii) By the promotion of certain crucial management attitudes and skills.

### 3. WHAT DO WE THINK OF OURSELVES AS SAFETY MANAGERS?

How do you regard your performance as a safety manager and the performance of your divisional team? What do you believe is the image you project - within the division? to outsiders? Do you regard yourself as an excellent and effective manager? Has your team got high self-esteem?

Modern studies of self-image psychology (for example, the "New Age Thinking" programme) has provided an insight into the relationship between what people think of themselves and how they behave - both as individuals and in teams. Many examples from the family, the job, and sporting arenas can be cited.

The fact is that, by and large, if your self-esteem is high, if you expect to succeed and if those who work for you know that you expect them to succeed, then success will follow.

Each of you are able to decide as individuals and then as a team on the self-image you wish to hold and project. Once decided, a conscious effort is required to imprint the new picture - the technique (by using Affirmations and Visualisation) is very simple and straight-forward. You will learn these when you go through the New Age Thinking Programme.

Here is an example of an affirmation which I use:

With respect to the safety programme in the Northern Region:

We are sincere about caring for people;  
We are committed to achieving success;  
We are efficient and effective in managing the programme; and  
We are mentally tough in that we have very high expectations and accept only the highest standards.

If we know ourselves to be sincere, committed, efficient, and mentally tough in the pursuit of excellence, those around us will perceive this and respond to it.

Here is my image, my vision of the way the safety programme in the Northern Region is:

1. Every officer and man is deeply committed to working safely and looking out for his own welfare, and that of his mates.
2. Every job is preplanned so that hazards are identified early, and personnel are prepared (mentally and physically) to deal with them.
3. The programme is a success because all those involved believe it to be so. The motivation is pride and personal satisfaction, coupled with dis-satisfaction with a less than perfect situation.

So I hope you see that high personal and team self-esteem is one of the keys to building a successful safety climate and thus producing a successful safety performance. I now expect that each of you (as individuals and as team members) will set some time aside to think about your image and how to imprint the vision of success.

#### 4. HOW CAN WE MEASURE SAFETY CLIMATE?

The traditional safety statistics give an indirect measure of safety climate. However, there are many weaknesses in the statistics, as a guide to safety climate, as you all know. For example:

- (i) Many "near miss" accidents are never reported or recorded. Luck plays a big part.
- (ii) The difference between an MTA and LTA is artificial and can vary with a doctor's whim.
- (iii) Records can be "cooked" (e.g., propping up, use of sick leave, etc.)

All the same, it would appear self-evident that in a division where our people are not injured on the job, a successful safety climate exists.

Dennis Glennon (Director of I.F.A.P.) and others have attempted to measure the safety climate in companies by means other than standard accident statistics.

Studies were made of companies where workplace injury rates were low, and medium. Three crucial factors were found to be:

##### CRUCIAL FACTORS INHERENT IN ACHIEVING A SAFETY CLIMATE:

- Peoples perceptions of MANAGEMENT ATTITUDE.
- Peoples perceptions of WORKPLACE SAFENESS.
- Peoples perceptions of IMPORTANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SAFETY TRAINING.

Although studies of this sort have not yet been made in the Forests Department, there is good evidence to suggest that these three factors tend to be universal.

Let us now examine them in more detail, and taking each point as it arises, discuss how we stand in the local scene.

## 5. THE ATTRIBUTES OF A SUCCESSFUL SAFETY CLIMATE

### 5.1 Management Attitude

In almost every instance where good safety performance was found to occur, the following could also be found:-

- (i) A strong desire by senior staff to make their "patch" a safer and healthier work place.
- (ii) Staff are well informed about safety and health issues.
- (iii) Safety has a high priority at meetings.
- (iv) Senior staff participate on safety committees.
- (v) Staff encourage and welcome criticism of hazards or potential hazards on the job (and expedite remedial action).
- (vi) Senior staff ensure that all staff and supervisors down the line are fully aware of their safety responsibilities.
- (vii) Staff pursue safety policies because they want to, not because they are forced to.
- (viii) The Safety Officer has a high status in the management team.

In Forests Department divisions, the attitude of the senior divisional staff (the D.F.O. and D/F) are most important, but so is that of every other officer. The above eight characteristics provide a clear picture of the way people in the division see their staff behaving in places where few accidents occur.

Management attitude has been shown to be the most important factor contributing to lower work injuries.

The key follow-up to this Seminar is a critical self-examination of management attitude in the division to see how we match up to the eight requirements listed.

#### 5.2 Workplace Safeness

After Management Attitude, the next most important factor is workplace safeness. This is the traditional area of "good housekeeping". It sounds hackneyed, but goes a long way.

A safe workplace does not just occur of its own accord: you have to work to create it and maintain it. (This insistence on standards not only reduces hazards, but is an indicator of team self-esteem and management attitude, so the effect snowballs).

The most important aspects of workplace safeness are:-

- (i) Hazardous machines are guarded or replaced (or the work is designed so they are not needed in the first place).
- (ii) Correct procedures are laid down and used for handling flammable, toxic or corrosive chemicals.
- (iii) Workplaces and vehicles and plant are kept clean and orderly.
- (iv) Protective equipment is provided where required, and is properly maintained.

- (v) Fire risks in buildings and workshops are minimised.
- (vi) There are adequate inspection systems to identify hazardous or dangerous machinery, plant or conditions. Remedial action where necessary is efficient and effective.
- (vii) The division itself is considered to be a safe place to work when compared with other organisations in the same or similar work, by those who work there.

There are probably several other aspects of workplace safeness which can be related to work in the forest, but thorough and on-going attention to those listed above will provide a powerful boost to our safety climate.

### 5.3 Safety Training

Safety training is vital to the fostering of a successful safety climate.

Training must be adequate and it must be effective. To achieve this the following is required:-

- (i) There must be money provided each year to cover training needs.
- (ii) Training needs range from induction of new people to improving the skills and understanding of existing people.
- (iii) Every training programme must be professionally carried out to ensure that it is effective.

In an effective training programme we make sure the trainees adopt what they have been taught. To do this, you must test, observe and retrain often many times. This implies an ongoing commitment to training, in terms of money, effort and staff time.

## 6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our goal in the Northern Region is to build and maintain a safe working climate. We want to work in a show in which people are not injured on the job.

We know that the first step to success in safety management is to develop and promote a self-image of excellence. We must believe that we are :- sincere, caring, committed, efficient and tough when it comes to fostering a climate in which our people don't suffer accidents while working for us.

High self-esteem in the team is the first step towards production of consistent excellence in safety performance.

We also know that there are three crucial aspects of management contributory to success:-

- management attitude (yours and mine)
- workplace safety ("good housekeeping")
- the training programme (efficient and effective)

Where do we go from here? I suggest these steps for your division:

- (i) Agree on what you want (the aim).
- (ii) Spell out the result (the picture).
- (iii) Analyse the existing situation and identify areas for improvement (climate analysis).
- (iv) Allocate what's needed, (time, money to make the improvement you want, effort).

(v) Predict possible set-backs so that they don't distract or disillusion you, or deflect you from the goal.

(vi) Set only the highest standards and be tough and determined in their pursuit.

The conduct of a successful safety programme offers a great reward: fit, healthy staff and employees enjoying their work in the Forests Department, eager to share, and contribute to your goals of excellence, and a satisfying team achievement.

A final word: the need for Resilience

If you agree to seek certain goals, or set out to build a certain team image but don't get there straight away, what do you feel? Discouragement? Hopelessness? Do you give it all away? In the past many a Safety programme foundered when an accident occurred.

We are not like that in the Northern Region. We have a clear picture of what we want and will not be content with anything less. Naturally there will be disappointments, but we treat these as temporary setbacks, not the end of the line, or a reason for lowering our sights.

The lessons of long study and experience has shown that if we maintain high self-esteem, display the right attitude, concentrate on getting a good, safe workplace and put the effort into effective training programmes, the result will be lasting success pride and satisfaction, and not only in safety, but across the board as achievements flow on from one operation to another.



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REGIONAL SUPERINTENDENT

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