

*Winner of Ecolab Prize for Best Operator Paper at the
75th Vic Water Industry Operations Conference, Bendigo, Sept. 2012*

CHALLENGES OF EFFECTIVE HEALTH & SAFETY TRAINING



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*38th Annual WIOA Qld Water Industry Operations Conference
Parklands, Gold Coast
4 June to 6 June, 2013*

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ABSTRACT

Ensuring that skills and training of staff are concurrent with ever changing legislations, codes and striving for continued improvements for industry best practice will always provide a challenge in any industry.

For North East Water, as with many other organisations, the challenge was compounded by having valued long term employees with experience gained over many years, in some cases over thirty years in the water industry.

The issue was to find methods of continually providing information, instruction and training that did not make staff feel they were being made to “suck eggs” and that was seen as a value added addition to their careers.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Generally, the world over, there are only three main questions that a court or a regulator will ask in the event of an incident:

- Was a safe workplace provided?
- Was the person trained?
- Was the person supervised?



These questions naturally form the base principles of the North East Water incident investigation methodology and in truth it was recognised that, especially in the more long term workers, there was very little evidence of training.

During my work as a health and safety manager in the United Kingdom I was once asked by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the equivalent of WorkSafe, “*can you prove this employee knows what you claim they know*”. Having duly provided copies of training files and sign offs for procedures etc., the HSE challenged me and stated, “*this proves they have it, can you prove they know it*”

It was recognised at North East Water that this same issue was apparent. We are very fortunate that our staff are very skilled at their work and our opportunity to conduct investigations was, thankfully, very limited.

The few we did embark on however showed a gap in our management of training for health and safety, especially for long term employees.

The injury statistics for North East Water are improving year on year, this year saw a reduction in lost time injuries from four (4) down to one (1) and the frequency rate fell from twelve (12) to four (4), (Figure 1), an achievement that we can all be very proud of. However, this still shows there is work to be done and improvements to be made.

We asked our staff a key question “given the current level of training, would you be happy to let your sons, daughter or respected other perform this task?”

For North East Water this was a critical question that ensured that all staff saw value and perspective of the holistic health and safety training program.

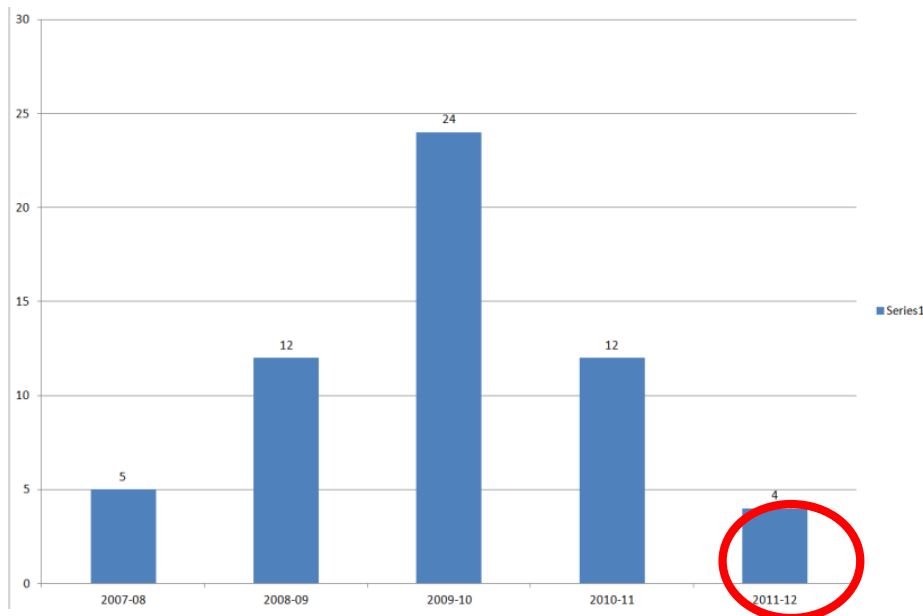


Figure 1: *Extract Annual Report 2011-12 – Lost Time Injury Frequency Rates*

2.0 DISCUSSION

2.1 Consultation

North East Water recognised that the key to any change and effective, efficient management was to engage employees at the earliest opportunity.

North East Water began by consulting with key stakeholders, this included the Health and Safety Committee, Executive Management and the Human Resources Department as well as key employees.

The consultative process took into account various measures and metrics to determine the most effective path forwards and included:

- A review of five years incident and injury statistics was performed to identify and analyse incident trends, mechanisms and agencies.
- Identification of a top ten operating procedures list.
- A gap analysis of current training files was performed. This task required a detailed audit of over 150 folders, some spanning over thirty years.
- A training needs analysis was developed that was determined through position descriptions and included initial and refresher training. Some refresher training was dictated by regulatory obligations. For others, trenching and shoring for instance, the consultative approach was able to determine a suitable timeframe.
- An electronic database, CRIS 21, was implemented to capture training and personnel records.
- North East Water joined the North East Regional Development Scheme, NERDS, and an electronic training platform using a system called E Learning.

2.2 Training Delivery Methods

North East Water needed to overcome the issue of not making experienced workers feel they were being treated like children with the training that was required.

There was also the issue, thankfully not often heard at North East Water, where we needed to get away from the mantra “*we’ve never had to do it that way before.*”

North East Water seized on the phrase “*tell me and I’ll do it, show me and I’ll understand*”. This of course was the result we wanted to get from our training to staff. Understanding leads to valuing and ultimately leads to compliance. If you have compliance then incidents should not occur.

It was apparent that video Standard Operating Procedures (SOP’s) was the way forward.



2.3 In-House Filming

It was determined that the videos would have the most effect if they starred our own people.

North East Water also recognised that the people who had the information we wanted in the SOP’s were also, ironically the same people whose training files were lacking in information.

This was the key to obtaining buy in and engaging these long term employees in the process without them feeling that they were being treated in an inferior manner. Moreover, the guys felt a sense of purpose in transferring their acquired skills into a format that would benefit younger and less experienced members of staff.

We engaged with experienced employees to write our scripts and to layout the scenes required and staff volunteered to be in the videos.

2.3 Delivery of the Training

The TNA is linked to the North East Water “Flying Start” induction program. This ensures that all new employees training is planned and agreed with their supervisor prior to their first day. This includes, amongst other training, receiving the video SOP’s.

The video is presented though the E-Learning platform which the employee logs into via an enrolment sent from HR.

Following the viewing of the SOP video and reading the supporting written SOP, the employee is navigated to a questions screen to sit a formal test.

Feedback is provided for wrong answers and for answers where we might like to enhance and re-enforce the message of the training throughout the questions screens.

On successful completion of the module, the employee is able to print a certificate and the employees training file in CRIS 21 is automatically updated.

3.0 CONCLUSION

The video SOP format has been widely accepted as a suitable means of conducting initial and refresher training for all employees, including more experienced staff.

The success of the initiative may be masked by other projects being embraced by staff, health and safety can very often be an unseen gain and a very visible loss when an organisation looks backwards at performance.

The key for North East Water was to take the three main investigation questions that are asked retrospectively and ask them proactively to prevent injury harm and damage.

The training aspect is certainly satisfied using the approach that North East Water has taken, training is determined, planned, delivered, verified and refreshed in a format that is acceptable to new and long term staff.

The video SOP does not remove the need for on the job shadow training and does not make a new person a process expert overnight.

On the question of “would you allow your son, daughter or respected other to perform a given task with this type of training”, the answer has come back as “YES”.



4.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All North East Water staff, their acceptance of change and involvement in the process has driven its success.

Matt Lane – Former Public Relations Officer for all his help filming and editing the video SOP's and providing the voice over.