


Staff Engagement and Safety Culture

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, businesses must engage with workers and enable them to participate in improving health and safety.

You must:

- Ensure that staff's views on health and safety matters are asked for and taken into account.
- Have clear, effective, and ongoing ways for staff to suggest improvements or raise concerns on a day-to-day basis.

Beyond this though, your operation's culture around safety matters will have a significant impact on how effectively your SMS is implemented.

 **Note!** A recent study found that workplaces with strong safety cultures had significantly lower rates of injuries and illnesses than workplaces with weak safety cultures.

A positive safety culture is characterised by full buy-in to your systems and procedures, with every staff member taking personal responsibility for overall safety, their own safe behaviour, and the welfare of others.

A positive safety culture is underpinned by leadership commitment and continual improvement.

Leadership commitment

The commitment of top leadership and the involvement of staff in the developing and continual improvement of an organisation's Safety Management System are the most important factors in its effectiveness.


Top leadership is defined in the [Adventure Activities Regulations Safety Audit Standard](#) as:

A person or group of people associated with the operator's organisation who direct and control the operations at the highest level within the legal entity. Top leadership is equivalent to the 'officers' of a person controlling a business or undertaking (PCBU) as defined in the Health and Safety at Work Act.

Depending on the scale and nature of the operation, top leadership may include directors, trustees, board members, executive managers, or an owner operator. It doesn't extend to any holding company or other form of separate ownership.

Leaders of a positive safety culture have full buy-in to organisational systems and procedures, take personal responsibility for safety, and expect all staff to do the same.

Continual improvement

 **Note!** Continual improvement is an important part of a strong safety culture.

To continually improve an operation needs to keep looking forward and identify ways to actively improve safety.

Learning from near miss (and hits) provides a valuable opportunity for improvement – see [Incident Reporting](#)

Setting health and safety goals and objectives also helps drive continual improvement. They should be developed with input from staff, documented, and include a process for monitoring and evaluating progress against them. Goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time specific. Objectives are steps towards achieving your broader safety goals.

Regular internal and external safety reviews or audits are key components of continual improvement and are addressed in the [Safety Management System](#) section.

Communication

Teams with strong safety cultures have open, regular and effective communication.

This can be achieved in many ways, but should include:

- Building a culture of trust in which your team know they can raise any issues and that they'll be handled in a constructive and supportive manner.
- Acknowledging and accommodating individual communication styles, but ensuring the underlying principles of being open and honest are the same for everyone.
- Ensuring that a range of fit-for-purpose' communication options are used that meet the needs of your team. These could range from operational chats (and chat messaging) through safety meetings with formal agendas.
- Senior staff role modelling effective communication behaviour.