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GIVING WORKERS A STRONGER VOICE: *Growing our Safety Culture* programme

Safetree's *Growing our Safety Culture* programme is designed to improve worker involvement in health and safety, and to improve frontline leadership and risk management.

The programme was formally launched in 2018 but builds on a tool previously developed with the industry, ACC, and the former Department of Labour. By March 2019, nearly 800 workers had been through it.

In 2019 the programme was named a finalist in the NZ Workplace H&S Awards.

WHY THE PROGRAMME WAS DEVELOPED

Forestry is one of New Zealand's most dangerous industries. 42 forestry workers died on the job between 1 January 2011 and 5 March 2019¹. In the 13 months from July 2016 to July 2017 alone, 142 workers were injured seriously enough to need at least a week off work to recover.

An assessment of the industry's performance by the 2014 Independent Forestry Safety Review concluded that multiple layers of ownership and contractual relationships had resulted in a lack of co-ordinated leadership on health and safety.

There was poor communication across all levels of the supply chain, particularly at crew level. There was also a lack of clarity on standards and an inconsistent approach to risk management. Pockets of excellent performance existed. But overall, economic pressures had resulted in a dangerously weak health and safety culture. The Review's recommendations focused on improving leadership, risk management and worker engagement.

THE SOLUTION – HOW THIS INITIATIVE HELPS

Safetree's *Growing our Safety Culture* programme is designed to help address key problems identified by the Review team. The primary goal of the programme is to improve worker engagement and involvement in health and safety. However better engagement, by default, leads to better risk management. And by providing foreman and managers with tools to improve their leadership and communication, it helps lift leadership capability in the industry.

The programme is designed to surface what's actually happening in a workplace with regards to health and safety. This includes gaps between 'work as done' and 'work as imagined'. It provides a powerful catalyst to spark conversations between workers, and with managers. It is giving workers, often for the first time, a real voice in health and safety. Importantly, it also provides a facilitated process so that the issues raised by workers can be addressed.

At an industry level, the programme is contributing to a more co-ordinated approach to health and safety within forestry. It provides a pan-industry engagement tool that is fit-for-purpose, affordable and can be used at all levels of the supply chain, including by forest owners and managers. Importantly, it has been structured so anonymised data can be collected and analysed, so trends or areas of concern can be fed back to the industry.

HOW THE PROGRAMME WORKS

The programme has 3 elements:

- 1. Growing our Safety Culture assessment:** Trained *Growing our Safety Culture* facilitators guide crews/teams through an assessment, which focuses on 12 areas that research shows¹ are essential to good health and safety in forestry. The assessment includes statements describing safe and healthy practices relevant to each of the 12 area. Crews/teams rate how often they, and others, do these practices based on a scale of; 'Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often, Always'. There are different versions of the assessment for crews; contractors/crew bosses; and forest owners.
- 2. Report back:** Each crew's/team's results are analysed by Leading Safety, the experts in health and safety culture that helped develop the programme. The results are reported back to individual crews/teams using an easy to understand 'traffic light' tree. This 'tree' uses green to show what's working well, and red and orange for areas needing improvement. This provides a quick visual reference, so at a glance crews/teams can see elements for improvement.

¹ 2009 Workplace Culture & Leadership in Forestry project led by Dr Hillary Bennett of the Resiliency Centre. Funded by the Dept of Labour/ACC. Conducted with forestry operations in Rotorua & Nelson.

- 3. Feedback session:** The facilitator has another session with the team/crew to discuss the results. The crew/team identify one or two areas where they want to improve and make a plan for doing this.

THE INVESTMENT

The cost of the programme is based on cost recovery and FISC does not make any margin. Users pay a \$300 admin fee and between \$800 – \$1,000 a day for facilitators to run up to three workshops a day. The feedback reports cost \$500 per crew/team. Supporting resources used in the assessment are available free on the Safetree.nz website.

UPTAKE – STRONG INDUSTRY SUPPORT

There has been very strong industry support for the initiative. As of March 26, 2019:

- 11 forest owners/contractors had used the programme with crews, contractors/foremen or their own staff. These companies are: Timberlands, NZFM, Port Blakely, Ernslaw One, JNL, Rayonier Matariki, City Forest, Hancock Forest Management, Nelson Forests, Summit Forests and Kohurau Contracting. Timberlands is running it with everyone, including its board.
- 786 people have used the programme: including 73 crews; 37 forest-owner staff groups; 41 contractors/crew bosses.

These figures include those involved in a pilot of the programme in 2017 and those who used the programme once it was rolled out in 2018.

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

Benefits to the industry - For the first time, forestry can track progress on H&S safety culture

The programme has been set up so anonymised data from participants can be collected, analysed and trends identified for the industry.

The first report-back in November 2018 provided a baseline for the state of the industry's health and safety culture. This included what the industry does well and areas most in need of improvement. Future reports will track changes in the industry's culture, and enable us to measure the impact of the programme.

We are not aware of any other industry that has a tool enabling it to track culture across the entire industry.

Benefits to individual companies - Positive impacts on culture, H&S

Colin Maunder, Forest Risk Manager, Timberlands

Put 180 people through the programme: 110 from crews & 70 from Timberlands, including the board.

“For us a key benefit of the programme has been the way it stimulates good conversations in crews and teams. For example, one of our roading contractors organised for all the roading crews to come together to do the assessment. That was a great opportunity for them to discuss some issues they’re all dealing with. Having the independent facilitators is also important because it means people can talk more freely than if Timberlands was running this.

“Having the board and senior management team complete the programme was really helpful because it got them thinking more broadly about how their decisions affect health and safety. At the board level, directors are now more curious about the incident reports we provide them and are asking more questions. At management level, there’s been a conscious effort to emphasise the positive aspects of safety. For example, now when managers do safety visits, instead of just looking for things that need improving, they also look for ways to mentor teams to make improvements.

“At the contractor level one thing that stood out from the assessments was the need for more recognition of good work. As a company we’ve always done things like give people vouchers etc. But now the crews are setting up their own systems to recognise contributions to health and safety.

“A big benefit of the programme is that it’s given everyone a process for identifying problems and how to deal with them. For example, we had one contractor with two crews – one performing really well and one that wasn’t doing so well. They were able to use the programme to identify a problem with the leadership in the second crew, and to put things in place to support the crew foreman.

“We actually found the programme so useful that we use the 12 factors in the Safety Culture Tree to measure our health and safety performance. We set targets for each of them. For example, this year we have a goal of recognising 75 people for their health and safety contributions, and I’m pleased to say that we’re going to far exceed that.

“We’ve still got a lot of work to do on our culture. But the programme has helped us by giving us a way to identify what we do well and what needs work, along with a process for making improvements. Importantly, it also gave us a ‘shared language’ for talking about issues. That has been important to get everyone on the same page.”

Barry Wells, Harvesting Operations Manager, Port Blakely (Formerly Blakely Pacific)

Put about 100 staff and contractors through the programme.

“The benefits we saw from our initial use of the Safety Culture Tree (outlined in the case study) have continued. Probably the biggest benefit we’ve got from the programme is that it’s given people a process to identify and solve problems.

“People use it to solve all sorts of problems - not just with health and safety. They can just follow the same process. That’s been really helpful.

“It’s also been really useful to help us develop new managers and foremen. Recently we have had a new crew start, and had a change of ownership for another crew. The programme helped these new guys get up to speed more quickly and become good managers.

“We now have a low staff turnover in our crews, and I believe that’s partly because of the better crew culture that’s developed by having better problem solving. After we saw the benefits of the programme for crews, we decided to run it with Port Blakely staff as well.

“That’s been really helpful because it gave us a better understanding of how our decisions affect crews. It also helped us identify trends and drill down into problems, so we can focus on specific parts of the business that needed help. People have got very engaged with the programme.

“For many crews the program is now self-sustaining and they run the process themselves. Others still need some support – so the facilitators are still available to help on an as-needed basis. We let the crews decide how much support they need.

“Some still get the facilitators in every quarter, for others it’s annually.”

Exporting our good ideas

During a visit to New Zealand in 2017, directors from Port Blakely’s North American owners saw the impact the Safety Culture Tree assessment was having here, and decided to run it in North America.

Facilitators Neil Thomas and Wiremu Edmonds visited the US to explain the process. They then returned for a 17-day visit where they ran the assessment with about 30 Port Blakely crews in Washington and Oregon. They then helped the US crews develop action plans.

WORKING TOGETHER TO AMPLIFY OUR IMPACT

An important part aspect of the programme is how it was developed and rolled out.

Government and experts developed the ideas

The programme is based on the Safety Culture Tree assessment tool developed for forestry crews and foremen in 2008 by Dr Hillary Bennett and the industry, with funding from ACC and the Department of Labour.

The tool enabled crews to do a self-assessment of their culture against 12 key elements Dr Bennett and the industry identified as essential to good health and safety. At the time the tool was ground-breaking.

It was the first tool promoted by the then regulator that focused on the cultural aspects of health and safety, rather than the technical aspects. The tool was positively received by the forestry industry and several companies made use of it. However, there was no mechanism to continue to promote and support it. The tool was posted on the Department of Labour website and, apart from one or two enthusiastic companies that continued to use it, was largely forgotten about.

FISC turns these great ideas into a functioning programme

When FISC was formed in 2015 it was mandated to lead harm prevention activities in forestry, with a particularly focus on leadership, risk management and worker engagement. Rather than re-invent the wheel, FISC decided to build on the excellent thinking behind the Safety Culture Tree tool.

In 2017 it engaged Dr Bennett to work with the industry to update the tool ahead of a re-launch. This updating included extending the tool so it also applied to forest owners and managers – enabling them to explore their impact on the health and safety of their contracting crews. It also included reframing the language of the tool to make it more positive – so it highlights the behaviours that support good health and safety, rather than just those that undermine it.

With the help of facilitators Neil Thomas and Fiona Ewing, Dr Bennett ran a pilot of the programme with nine forestry companies in 2017. Feedback from the pilot was used to make further improvements. Importantly, a decision was made to transform the tool from a passive DIY assessment into an independently facilitated programme.

This change had three positive impact:

- Having independent facilitators run the assessment process means it is done in a consistent way across the industry, and that workers can speak more freely than they might otherwise.

- Teams get a report explaining the results, rather than having to interpret them themselves.
- The process no longer stops at the assessment. Facilitators go back to the crews/teams to discuss the results, what the crew/team wants to change, and how to do that.

The final step in creating the programme was to develop infrastructure to support it. This included training professional facilitators, running a marketing programme including case studies, and putting in place a governance system to ensure quality and continuous improvement. It also included setting up a reporting system to collect, analyse and feedback pan-industry results.

KEY ROLES PLAYED BY THE PARTICIPANTS

The Forest Industry Safety Council: FISC leads harm prevention activities across forestry. The Council includes representatives of forest owners and managers, contractors, farm foresters, ACC, WorkSafe, NZCTU, Māori and workers. It is run by National Safety Director Fiona Ewing.

Leading Safety: Dr Hillary Bennett is a registered psychologist and is principal of Leading Safety, which develops and facilitates H&S leadership and engagement programmes all levels in NZ.

Neil Thomas and Wiremu Edmonds are champions and facilitators for the Growing our Safety Culture programme. They were also heavily involved in developing and testing the programme. Neil is a director of health and safety consultancy Forestsafe, and has more than 35 years forestry experience. Wiremu is a director of Tuakiri which runs the Stand in the Gap safety programme established after the death of his son Robert Eparara in a forestry accident in 2013.

Others: We'd like to acknowledge the contribution of Don Ramsay formerly of ACC, the Nelson and Rotorua forest companies that helped develop the original tool (particularly Wayne Dempster of Rayonier Matariki), and everyone who helped pilot the programme.

MORE INFORMATION

- See the programme resources: <https://safetree.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/12-Safety-Culture-Resources-1.pdf> including the Safety Culture Tree
- See the Port Blakely case study: <https://safetree.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/How-Blakely-Pacific-is-growing-its-safety-culture.pdf> or watch the video <https://safetree.nz/safety-culture/>