

# **SAFETY CULTURE - HIGHLIGHTING THE NEXT STEPS FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH IMPROVEMENT**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. The Queensland Mining Industry Health and Safety Conference is an important event on the minerals industry's safety and health calendar.

It is two years since I last addressed this conference. At that time I talked about current industry safety mindsets and asked whether we were playing the right game.

Our industry has progressed well since then, we've left many of the old mindsets behind us, but there is still much more that needs to be done.

People are still being killed working in our industry. Since the time I last spoke at this conference – from September 1997 until now - - 23 mining industry fatalities have occurred.

Which begs the question: if we have done so much to improve the industry's safety and health performance – and I believe that we have made significant progress – why are we still killing people at an average of more than 20 each year over the past ten years?

What else do we need to do before we get it right?

Today I would like to address this question. I'd like to highlight some of the next steps which the Minerals Council sees as necessary to keep us moving towards that ultimate goal of eliminating all minerals industry fatalities, injuries and diseases.

## **MCA SAFETY AND HEALTH VISION, BELIEFS AND ACTIVITIES**

When I last spoke to this conference I highlighted the Council's safety and health vision and beliefs. Our vision is for an Australian minerals industry which is free of fatalities, injuries and diseases. Our beliefs include the view that no task is so important that it cannot be done safely and that everyone

has a personal responsibility for the safety and health of themselves and others.

In 1997 I also outlined the Council's safety and health strategy which encompasses three main drivers – leadership, recognition and promotion, and reporting.

We are still busy implementing that strategy. But as the industry's national representative, the Council itself has a leadership responsibility to look forward, to identify and to act on the next steps which need to be taken to achieve our vision.

## **ARE GOOD SYSTEMS ENOUGH?**

In doing this we have come to question whether good safety management systems are enough to eliminate fatalities, injuries and diseases. The adoption of risk management approaches and improvements in safety management systems certainly appear to have brought down the number of Lost Time Injuries. But there is no corresponding, sustained reduction in the number of fatalities or potentially fatal incidents.

This has led the Council, like many of its member companies, to ponder the human factor – to seek a way to examine the role that behaviour plays in safety performance and to determine whether we can use this information to eliminate the serious and fatal incidents which have eluded us so far.

This examination has led us to the conclusion that good safety management systems should be complemented by a behaviour-based safety approach to ensure a continued and consistent improvement to safety performance.

How did the Council come to this view? We started late last year by commissioning a survey of the minerals industry's safety culture to determine which factors contribute to safety culture and therefore behaviour. The survey provided us with a great deal of information – much of which will be covered in a presentation to be made by SAFEmap later today.

Amongst other things, the survey results confirmed that there are a number of hurdles

proportion of employees, right across the workforce, who felt that safety was their own responsibility. In fact, these two factors were in the top five of all factors responded to most negatively by the survey participants.

This is a significant challenge identified by the safety culture survey. We must find ways to stop complacency and to ensure that the entire workforce is aware, alert and managing safety risks at all times.

This brings me to the second type of complacency, the one which encourages us to think that we are doing what we can, that it is someone else who is dragging the chain, and that it is not up to us to do better and try harder to bring about the necessary improvements.

As I have already mentioned, it is not enough to just deliver the message that safety is important. Safety must become an integral part of business practice, a way of life rather than a process, before people will lay aside their cynicism and complacency and begin to change their behaviour and their attitudes.

There are a variety of ways to do this. Many of these are borne out in the safety culture survey. In the time I have left I would like to highlight three factors which can help us to surmount the hurdles I have mentioned today. These are commitment, consistency and cooperation.

## **COMMITMENT**

Obviously, commitment to achieving the vision is fundamental. The safety culture survey analysis confirmed this by finding that the commitment of an organisation to safety made the most significant contribution to the overall responses in the survey than any other factor.

But it is not enough just to keep saying that we are committed. We have to genuinely embrace the need for change, publicly demonstrate our belief that the vision can be achieved and continually show through our actions that safe production is the most highly valued behaviour in the organisation.

## **CONSISTENCY**

Consistency is another key factor. The behavioural approach to safety is based on the principle that people seek consistency between values and behaviour – their own as well as others'. How does this affect safety

performance? When people are faced with an inconsistency between their values and their behaviour, they may change their behaviour to match the value system or their value system to match their behaviour. But if people don't value safety, and have not been given any reason to question or re-assess this value, they won't consistently act safely.

Equally important is the perception of consistency in other people's values and behaviour. If management says that safety is its first priority but then shows through certain behaviour that this is not the case, people will assume that there is a consistency between management's behaviour and values and therefore conclude that management does not really value safety. The findings of the safety culture survey suggest that this is happening in our industry. This can lead to disillusionment and cynicism as I mentioned earlier. If management is not perceived to truly value safety, then why should the workforce be expected to feel or act any differently?

If we are not able to establish safe work behaviour as a true and fundamental value in the workplace, or we fail to maintain those behaviours which consistently demonstrate that value, people may not be motivated to consistently work safely.

This is why it is not enough to just be committed to the vision. Our actions and words in support of that vision must be consistent, and constant, if we are to be taken seriously by our employees, our employers and our peers and if they are to embrace the vision themselves.

## **COOPERATION**

Cooperation is the third factor that can help us to overcome the hurdles preventing us from achieving greater safety and health improvement. Cooperation in the workplace is perhaps more important than we realise. The safety culture survey found that a team-based approach to safety strategy had a significant correlation with positive safety responses. This suggests that organisations which use a team-based approach to safety management will be more successful in achieving more positive safety perceptions, and therefore behaviour, than those organisations which do not.

which could prevent us from achieving our vision. Today I will focus on three of them – complexity, cynicism and complacency.

## **COMPLEXITY**

First of all, let me talk about complexity. I believe that in our drive to improve safety and health performance we have become too narrowly focussed and too dependent on safety management systems. There is a proliferation of management systems, packages and approaches currently available – for quality and risk management as well as for safety management. We have faithfully applied one or more of these, put the manuals into our offices and directed that all the necessary paperwork and training be undertaken. But all our best efforts may prove to have been counterproductive. The numerous layers of management systems have become too complex and are now seen as a burden on the workplace.

The safety culture survey found high levels of dissatisfaction with safety management systems – particularly the quality of programs and training – across the industry and amongst all employees, from managers and supervisors, to operators and contractors. The survey participants from Queensland expressed this dissatisfaction strongly and, except for specialist staff, consistently amongst all employee groups.

The survey analysis also found that safety management systems had a strong influence on employee perceptions overall, suggesting that an improvement in safety management systems could contribute to a more positive safety culture.

## **CYNICISM**

Cynicism is the second hurdle I would like to highlight. I believe that cynicism and disillusionment go hand in hand. They can be a product of many things, including the complexity issue which I have just mentioned.

How does cynicism affect safety performance? Well, it is manifested in one of the strongest findings made by the safety culture survey. This finding suggests that, despite management successfully communicating that safety is important, the workforce does not as strongly believe that management values them

or that management recognises safety and safe work practices.

This suggests that the workforce may be faced with conflicting messages. On the one hand management says that safety is its number one priority. But management may not be providing adequate recognition when safe work occurs. Even worse, management may inadvertently be encouraging risk-taking behaviour by recognising quicker, more productive work practices over safe work practices.

When faced with this conflict between what management says and what they do, the workforce becomes disillusioned with the safety message and cynical about management credibility. This is reflected in several of the survey findings.

One of the more disconcerting findings of the survey is the fact that a large proportion of people in this industry do not believe that we can eliminate all accidents. Sixty-two percent of operator employees indicated this in the survey and so did 40 percent of their supervisors. Link this with the 42 percent of operators who strongly support the notion that employees are prepared to take risks when job pressures occur, and you can see that there is a potent mix of influences on the workforce to continue to take risks.

This tells us something important about the need to be consistent – the need to match our words with our actions – if we are to have any chance of achieving our vision.

## **COMPLACENCY**

The final hurdle I would like to mention today is complacency. I would suggest that there are two forms of complacency which are thwarting our efforts.

The first type of complacency is that which is brought about by many years of experience in the minerals industry, by long-term familiarity with equipment, systems and processes and by the resulting view that "it will never happen to me".

The safety culture survey emphasises the seriousness of this problem. It found that a disturbingly high proportion of employees showed neutrality towards the danger in their jobs. In addition, there was a very low

In addition to workplace cooperation, it is crucial that we, as an industry and as a community, cooperate with each other to pursue the safety and health vision. The elimination of all fatalities, injuries and diseases is not just an activity for the Minerals Council of Australia. It is not just the responsibility of corporate HQ, the mine managers or the regulators. The vision can only be achieved through the commitment, cooperation and consistent support of each and every person involved in the Australian minerals industry.

There are already some good examples of how cooperation is taking us in the right direction.

The Minerals Council of Australia and the Queensland Mining Council have a productive partnership that operates very much on the principle of cooperation. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Council for the support it has lent to our safety and health efforts over the past three years and to commend them for their own activities in this area. The QMC has embraced the vision and continually highlights the need to eliminate all fatalities, injuries and diseases. It shows and promotes strong leadership by making safety and health a priority issue at its Board meetings and by encouraging CEOs to present to the Board on their safety and health initiatives. The Council's safety and health activities are broad and varied, ranging from the fight to keep the duty of care principle alive in legislation, to the establishment of a new incident reporting system and the running of the Queensland Safety and Health Innovation Awards. I look forward to continuing this cooperative approach with the Queensland Mining Council.

Another good example of cooperation is the work that is being done on mine safety through ANZMEC, the Australian and New Zealand Minerals and Energy Council. This is a major cooperative exercise involving Federal, State and Territory Ministers, as well as the Australian minerals industry and the broader community, to develop and agree on a framework that will underpin mine safety legislation and regulation throughout the nation.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me recap. I believe we have made good progress towards to elimination of all fatalities, injuries and diseases. But there is still much to be done and we cannot be complacent. Safety management systems have an important role and they have made a significant contribution to the progress we have made to date. But the human factor in safety performance needs much more attention.

In its leadership role, the Minerals Council has embraced this challenge by commissioning the safety culture survey and by distributing the results throughout the industry and the community for consideration and action.

In addition to good safety management systems, we must adopt a behavioural approach to the improvement of safety and health performance.

We must all be aware of, and alert to, the hurdles which may prevent the achievement of our vision. Complexity, cynicism and complacency are but three of them.

We must all do more to embrace those approaches which will help to overcome the hurdles. It is the responsibility of all to be genuinely committed to the elimination of all fatalities, injuries and diseases, to consistently demonstrate that commitment and to work cooperatively together to achieve the vision.

These are the next steps which need to be taken if we are to continue to improve our industry's safety and health performance. I commend them to you and look forward to working with you all in future.