



Tikanga approach to health and safety builds a stronger business

James Fruean, of Wellington Pipelines, used to see health and safety as a 'drag'. Today it's a passion, with an approach based on tikanga principles boosting productivity through a strongly engaged workforce.

Successful initiatives include daily tool box talks and risk identification; more practical site record-keeping; health and safety breakfasts and many others, all developed in collaboration with workers.

The Wainuiomata-based company, founded and run by James and wife Vanessa, has always operated a whanau-based environment, committed to providing opportunities for local people, and hooking into local community services such as WINZ and 'Youth Inspire' to help grow young people in the workforce. The 26-strong team are a mixture of nationalities.

Wellington Pipelines carries out water and drainage infrastructure work for local authorities. Key risks include construction processes,

machinery, plant, deep excavations, underground services and utilities, slips, trips, abrasions and noise.

"I have a real appreciation of what good health and safety can do for your business. Our tikanga approach works for our Māori workers, as well as everyone on the crew."

Two years ago, triggered by client requirements, they began a journey to better engage their workers in workplace health and safety.

Strong leadership is a defining factor. Equally James and Vanessa feel that strong community connection is one of the drivers behind their commitment to health and safety – families trust them to look after



their loved ones and they take that responsibility very seriously.

However, James recognised that simply talking about health and safety expectations wasn't enough – taking a whanaungatanga approach, through building confidence and relationships, has proved far more successful.

Workers' input is sought on decisions ranging from day-to-day site management, to major changes. Their suggestions have driven innovation and practical improvements and procedures which people actually stick to.

"Every work day starts with a toolbox meeting," said James. "We stand in a circle and talk about the day's work plan and risks.

"It's very much a two-way street with the boys chipping in on stuff like where the underground services are. It wasn't easy at first. Māori can often be quite shy about speaking up, even in front of peers, but steady encouragement pays off".

James sees investing in health and safety as an investment in the business – with the benefits far outweighing the costs.

"The buy-in has been massive because they know that if they provide input, they see an end result."

"We had a problem with people not wearing hard hats so we consulted the boys. They weren't finding them user-friendly, so we trialled a different one, which they really like.

They were more expensive but it's worth it because they are all using them now. We're currently trialling full-faced masks because the boys told us that even when wearing safety goggles, they still get hit by stones when drilling.

"The buy-in has been massive because they know that if they provide input, they see an end result."

Monthly health and safety meetings are very popular – not least because Vanessa serves up a hearty breakfast of mince on toast.

"All the boys are: 'yeah', says James.

"The meetings are interactive. We use real life photos from our sites and ask them to identify hazards and risks. One time a guest speaker from NZTA brought actual examples of staff infringement records. Some of the guys were surprised at how fat their booklet was, and how their driving reflects on company records with the NZTA. Things like these make it real."

James says the benefits are 'endless'.

"We have better reporting, safer site management and client recognition for our health and safety processes. There are productivity benefits. Better communication means everyone is on the same page. If someone forgets where the underground services are, then there are several others who know about it.

"I recently got a call from the owner of a house we were working outside. He owns a national business and had seen our toolbox talks. He wanted to know how we achieve that level of worker buy-in.

"Now I have a real appreciation of what good health and safety can do for your business, it's become a passion. I'm constantly looking at ways we can do it better, be innovative and keep on track."

WORKER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The best outcomes are achieved when a business and its workers work together on health and safety. Worker Engagement and Participation is about having planned ways for:

- > workers to give input on issues which will (or are likely to) affect their health or safety. This includes asking for and taking into account their views and
- > workers to improve work health and safety on an ongoing basis (eg by raising concerns or suggesting improvements).

This will help you and your business to make better decisions – and keep your people and productivity thriving.

KEY POINTS

Worker engagement through whanaungatanga has meant:

- > worker ideas drive innovation and practical improvements
- > excellent worker buy-in
- > better reporting and site management
- > client recognition, and productivity benefits.

For more examples and information visit worksafe.govt.nz
