

Worker participation in risk management improves efficiency

There aren't any health and safety (H&S) skeletons in the cupboard at Upper Hutt-based Real Steel. However, one did 'visit' for a training workshop on manual lifting.

"Our health provider brought a skeleton to our manual lifting workshop to demonstrate how the spine works when you are lifting. Since then, we've had a significant reduction in manual lifting injuries," said H&S Manager Robert Smith.

Having practical, hands-on workshops is just one example of the strong ongoing focus on worker participation, which has transformed the company's H&S culture, significantly reducing incidents requiring medical treatment and bringing business efficiencies.

Real Steel, which employs 33 people, designs, builds and supplies heavy steel replacement machinery parts for industries like mining, quarrying, forestry and recycling.

The work involves cutting, grinding and working with forklifts, overhead cranes and the country's largest press brake steel-folding machine.

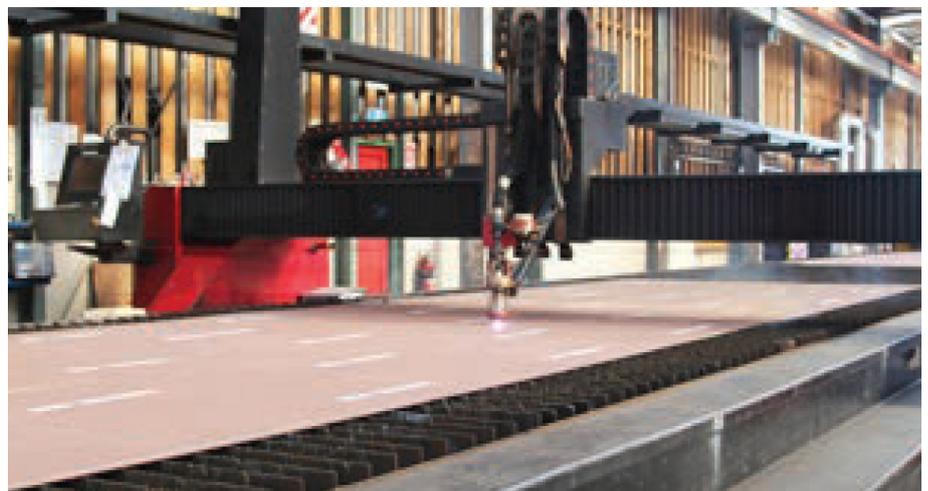
Production Manager Charlie Davidson has also introduced a whiteboard where people can proactively mark up any issues and a deadline is set for resolving them.

"Encouraging workers to participate hasn't been difficult, buy-in has been brilliant."

"All issues get added to the board, and we have updates on progress at meetings," said Mr Smith.

"Everyone knows that anything on the whiteboard stays there until it's sorted. It's just a good, straightforward tool to make sure everyone can contribute."

Workers can raise issues or ideas at daily production meetings or ask one of the three staff member H&S representatives to flag these up during their regular meetings with managers.



Mr Smith said, while the company has had very few lost time for injury (LTI) incidents in the last five years, too many hazard incidents were occurring. The changes to the H&S legislation prompted management to review what they were doing and how they could involve their people in making improvements.

A first step was engaging workers in drawing up a 'top ten risks register.'

"The new legislation is all about managing your H&S risks and that was a key move for us," said Mr Smith. "We asked everyone to list what they considered the top ten hazards and associated risks. Taken alongside our incident history, we were able to clearly identify our top H&S risks.

"Our number one hazard is our cranes which lift steel plates onto cutting beds. History showed we were averaging 12 incidents of plates dropping from cranes each year. We identified plates dropping as our number one safety risk.

"The others risks are around forklifts, manual lifting, noise, air pollution, the plasma arc cutter, trip hazards, grinders, hot work and press brake machinery.

"There's real recognition of the potentially harmful consequences if you don't follow correct procedures."

Signage now features prominently throughout the workshop. Two risks are focussed on each month in a rolling programme, with messages reinforced at staff meetings.

"I can't remember the last medical treatment incident. That's very good in a business like ours. We're proud of what we've achieved together. Our goals are zero plate drops, forklift incidents and manual handling injuries, as well as 100 per cent reporting.

Real Steel has a quarterly H&S innovation award. This encourages workers to raise issues as well as promote recognition that everyone has responsibility for H&S, not just supervisors and managers.

Mr Smith said people feel comfortable raising concerns. "You hear people picking each other up on safety – like not wearing correct PPE or trying to manually lift something over 25 kg. There's real recognition of the potentially harmful consequences if you don't follow correct procedures."

"When the new legislation was mooted we recognised we had to get on board with that. It's been a steady evolution. Encouraging workers to participate hasn't been difficult, buy-in has been brilliant. It's just the way we do things now and is embedded in our culture."

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

- > Reduction in injuries.
- > Production efficiencies.
- > Brilliant worker buy-in.

For more examples and information visit worksafe.govt.nz
