

Powering Improvement

Improving Health and Safety Together

UK Electricity Companies are committed to the **Powering Improvement** initiative which supports the HSE Strategy, **Health and Safety of Great Britain: Be part of the solution**, launched in 2009. The three key elements of the initiative are Leadership, Competence and Worker Involvement.

Research shows that organisations with effective involvement of worker representatives have better health and safety performance than those without. This document sets out principles to ensure appropriate support for managers and safety representatives to work together to improve health and safety. Building on existing company practices, it complements commitments made as part of the Powering Improvement strategy to improve levels of engagement in safety and occupational health at all levels within the companies. The aim is to secure sustainable improvements in health and safety culture and behaviour leading to enhanced safety performance.

Background

All companies are committed to training managers and supervisors to appropriate levels in health and safety. Similarly worker representatives are given health and safety training plus time and resources to fulfil their functions. When workplace health and safety issues arise successful resolution is more likely to be achieved through a shared understanding and partnership approach, involving all parties working together.

Working Together – Key Principles

As we know, success requires more than a shared technical health and safety competence. Differences in the perception of risk and the adequacy of risk control measures require a broader set of skills requirements. Companies can equip managers and safety representatives and actively encourage behaviours conducive to collaboration, by *jointly* adopting and/or developing:

- A corporate health and safety strategy
- Effective communication and consultation channels between internal stakeholders (managers, representatives, OH/EAP services, facilities/estates management, contractors and their employee representatives)
- Joint training of H&S Representatives and middle managers in the soft skills of effective two way communication, persuasion and influence, establishing and maintaining good working relationships and the management of staff rehabilitation.
- SMART action planning, implementation and review with feedback to initiators of H&S notifications
- Exclusive resolution arrangements for health and safety matters

There is no single, defined approach to achieving the above aims. Companies will tailor both proactive and reactive interventions according to their own needs.

Examples of existing good practice include the following:

- The joint investigations and panels of inquiry many companies adopt.
- Joint safety inspections and safety tours/audits
- Joint workshops and/or subcommittees designed to identify solutions in specialist areas (e.g. distribution safety rules).
- Joint revision of safe systems of work arising from new tasks and updated legislation and risk assessments.
- UK Power Networks and EDF Energy have a detailed Charter underpinning the standards and behaviours necessary for a cooperative approach between the business and its Trades Unions.
- Scottish Power has a Health and Safety Representatives Charter in place, which was refreshed in 2010.
- E.ON H&S representatives training includes a focus on rapport-building and influencing skills, so that H&S representatives are better able to negotiate with their stakeholders.
- National Grid ensures that middle managers and H&S representatives are trained together, facilitating a strong understanding of each others' respective roles and functions and promoting a more articulate dialogue.
- Several companies are rolling out short stress and mental health courses jointly to managers and representatives to raise awareness and overcome the stigma and complexity of common mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.
- In another utility sector, the "Good Work, Good Health – Good Practice Guidelines" jointly produced by EU telecommunications companies and unions, promotes the adoption of joint strategies and the development of appropriate skills.

Benefits

Successfully working together delivers numerous benefits including:

- Shared understanding and ownership of company strategy and vision
- Visible improvements in health and safety culture
- Sharing knowledge, experience and skills, raising standards overall
- Tackling adversarial relationships that may act as barriers to trust and communication
- Better business efficiency through quicker health and safety issue resolution

Further Reading

- *HSE HSG263 - Involving your workforce in health and safety: good practice for all workplaces.*