

# Unison Contracting Services' Great Safety Performance Journey



For many Unison Contracting Services Limited (UCSL) employees, each day presents hazards intrinsic to the industry they work in. Our employees work with the invisible danger posed by electricity, often on challenging terrains or in storm conditions.

At UCSL, the safety and wellbeing of all employees is the most important value we hold, and we continue to focus on excellence and continuous improvement in relation to our safety culture, policies, and procedures.

One of the key elements to the on-going development of our safety culture has been the introduction of the Great Safety Performance project, which has already delivered significant results to UCSL and its employees.

The Great Safety Performance project is an initiative introduced by the Electricity Engineers Association (called the Safety Performance Project), as a tool to help the New Zealand electricity supply industry to address effective leading indicators, leadership and engagement, as key components in driving workplace culture improvement.

## About Unison Contracting Services Limited (UCSL)

UCSL is the contracting arm of Unison Networks Limited, one of New Zealand's largest electricity distribution network businesses. Servicing the Hawkes Bay, Taupo and Rotorua regions, UCSL has 200 employees, specialising in:

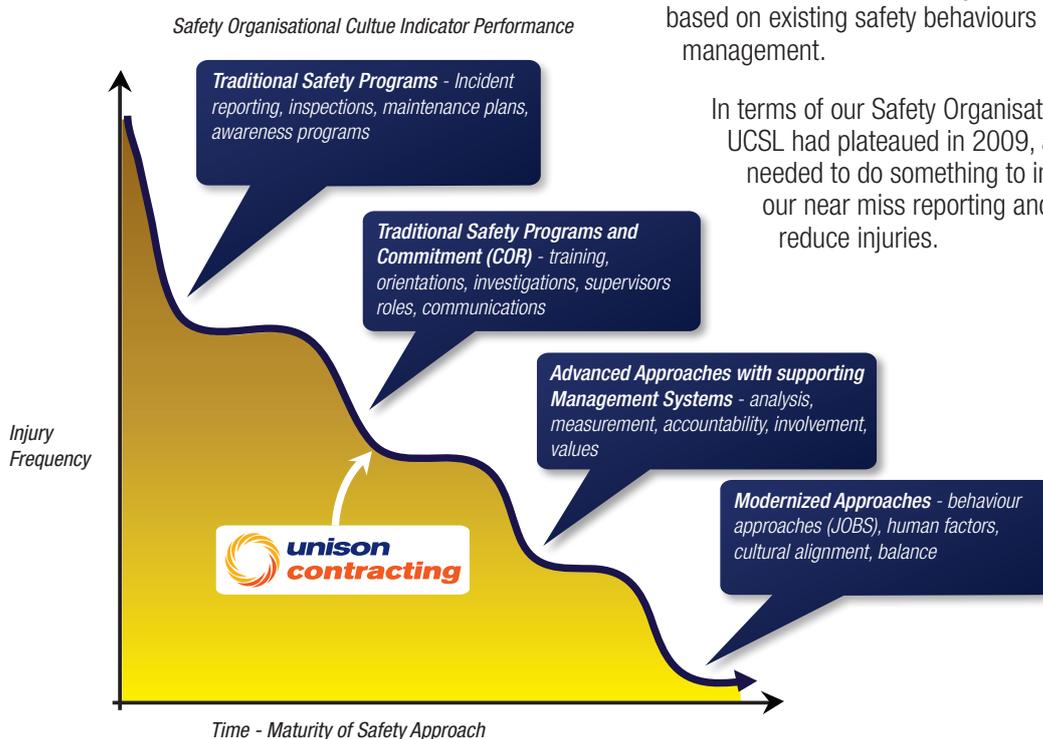
- Power – managing, maintaining, servicing, and installing overhead, underground and substation network assets,
- Civil – installation of utility services,
- Vegetation- Tree trimming, removal and control around power lines, and
- Fibre - construction and maintenance work for Unison Fibre Limited.

## Why we needed to review our Safety Culture

In 2009, UCSL's safety management system was accredited to the highest level of New Zealand Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) 'Workplace Safety Management Practices' programme. Although an excellent endorsement for our safety management system, we held concerns around our 'near miss' reporting culture, the number of safety non-conformances from workplace field assessments, and in particular that employees were incurring (on average) three lost time injuries per year.

To help us address these concerns around safety performance, we engaged an external specialist in 2009 to carry out an assessment of our field operations, focusing on safety, quality and productivity behaviours. This assessment identified that our safety culture was very reactive, and there were a number of 'unsafe behaviours' occurring. This assessment also identified there was a high possibility that one or more serious safety events involving field staff were imminent based on existing safety behaviours – something of significant concern to management.

In terms of our Safety Organisational Culture Indicator Performance, UCSL had plateaued in 2009, as demonstrated below. We knew we needed to do something to improve our safety culture and improve our near miss reporting and work assessment performance, and reduce injuries.



## Key Strategy/Initiative

The first step to addressing concerns around UCSL's safety performance was the development and implementation of a Health and Safety Strategy linking safety performance to the culture. The key objective was defined as 'taking health and safety as a critical business process, from Compliance to Culture'. The goal was that all UCSL staff knew that safety is the right thing to do, rather than something we have to do to meet legislative compliance requirements, and display this understanding through their actions at work. We wanted every employee to know they had a role to play in improving their safety, and that in order to develop this culture, we would all have to work shoulder to shoulder to achieve this.



## Why Safety Climate Project (GSP)

Undertaking a change in culture and behaviour across a company is no simple project, and so we investigated several safety culture programmes to help provide a structured pathway to develop a culture where safety was the first priority.

After consideration of the options, UCSL chose the Great Safety Performance (GSP) programme, because it was a New Zealand electricity industry initiative, supported by the Electricity Engineers Association.

The GSP programme was being used by similar companies to ours, who were also working to make significant improvements to their safety culture. By using the same programme, we determined we could benchmark our performance against these companies, and work alongside them to resolve common issues.

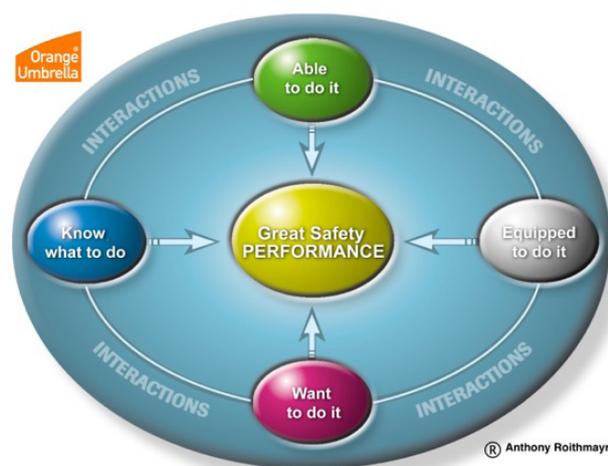
The GSP model also appealed for its six critical but clear key safety elements for an organisation to achieve 'Great Safety Performance'. These are:

- Knowing what to do,
- Being able to do it,
- Being equipped to do it,
- Wanting to do it,
- Safety work actions, and
- Interactions.

This GSP model is designed to be led by field staff and line supervisors, with management involvement. It's a simple process underpinned by Orange Umbrella®, who provide the evaluation information, tools, and processes.

The process begins with a survey of supervisors and field employees, with each group completing a survey specific to their role. The survey asks for their views on the company's performance across the critical safety elements. A series of follow-up workshops then allows Orange Umbrella's facilitator to further explore themes and issues raised by the survey, and seek recommendations on how the company can improve its safety performance.

The results of the survey and the follow up workshops allow management to determine key areas of focus, which are addressed by a committee established to manage the resulting action plan.



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## Our GSP Structure

In 2011, UCSSL decided to trial the GSP, surveying a selection of employees across our four business operations (Power, Civil, Vegetation and Fibre), and our three regions (Taupo, Rotorua and Hastings), based on the number of employees in these operations/regions.

We surveyed all line supervisors, as we recognised they were the interface between field staff and management, and were therefore key to improving our safety performance.

Following the survey and workshops, a GSP committee was established, chaired by UCSSL's Health and Safety Manager.

The committee comprised of representatives from across our business, including:

- Representatives from field staff, supervisors, management and executive management, and
- Unison Networks Ltd management representatives (the asset owner).

Terms of reference were established for the GSP Committee, including a working agreement and an action plan with agreed time frames, a record of actions to ensure personal accountability, with an agenda sent out one week prior to each meeting.

## GSP Results

To date, UCSSL has held three rounds of the GSP

- 2011 - Round 1 GSP Survey
- 2012 - Round 2 GSP Survey
- 2013 - Round 3 GSP Survey

As at 2013, the GSP programme is now in its third round, but we are aware that for most organisations, it's not until the fourth survey that significant improvements are usually made. A significant improvement is considered to be an improvement of 4% or more.

### Field Staff Survey

The following table is a summary of the percentage of improvement for the key safety elements, from the survey of field employees. It shows the change in results from the first round of the GSP survey to the second round, and then from the second round to the third.

Following the second round of the GSP, we were concerned that minimal improvements had been achieved, but were also mindful that change is a slow process. Our continued focus was rewarded after the third round, and we were delighted to see significant improvements had been made in most of the safety system elements. In particular, more employees 'Want to do it' (be safe), the rating of 'Interactions' between employees and management significantly improved, as did 'Safety Culture Indicators' which included employees receiving appropriate recognition and feedback, and management leadership towards safety.

Key Safety System Element	Survey 2 % of Improvement	Survey 3 % of Improvement
Safe Work Actions	+0.8	+1.7
Interactions	-2.9	<b>+10.4</b>
Know What To Do	-1.6	+2
Able To Do It	+1.1	+3
Equipped To Do It	+0.6	<b>+5.5</b>
Want To Do It	-4.7	<b>+13</b>
Safety Culture Indicators	-3.1	<b>+10</b>

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## Supervisor Survey

The following table is a summary of the percentage of improvement in the key safety elements from the three rounds of GSP surveys of the Supervisors. These results have the same pattern as the above employee results, i.e. minimal and in some cases no improvement from the round one survey to round two, but a significant improvement in all elements after the third survey.

Key Safety System Element	Survey 2 % of Improvement	Survey 3 % of Improvement
Safe Work Actions	-9.9	<b>+15.2</b>
Interactions	-8.5	<b>+11.5</b>
Know What to Do	-9.3	<b>+5.1</b>
Able to Do It	-6.2	<b>+4.8</b>
Equipped to do it	-9.8	<b>+8.4</b>
Want to do it	-8.2	<b>+13.6</b>
Safety Culture Indicators	-8.4	<b>+12.6</b>

## UCSL's Safety Performance 2011 – 2013

Following the significant improvements to our GSP results after the third survey round, we saw the following improvements in our company safety performance:

- Near miss reporting improvements by 300%,
- Medical treatment injuries reduced by 14%,
- Lost time injuries reduced to zero on average per annum, and
- Safety non-conformances from field assessments reduced by 10%.

The improvements in both the survey results and key safety performance indicators for 2013 gained positive feedback from staff and management, as well as from our Orange Umbrella facilitator who said they had 'seen improvements but not this quickly'.

A member of our field staff stated (as part of the employee focus group session during our ACC safety system audit February 2013);

'The GSP programme has sorted out a lot of problems, there are regular meetings and updates, staff are happier to talk about near misses, and worksite safety has evolved and improved as a result. There is a GSP committee which has representatives from across the organisation'.

## Why Significant Improvements after Survey Three?

After survey one, we established a GSP Committee with a limited number of employee, management and Unison Network representatives. Although we received over 100 recommendations from the employee and supervisors workshops, a lot of these were employee's perceptions, and it was very difficult to categorise these into actual actions. As a result, after 12 months of regular meetings, the GSP committee had only completed 34 actions.

After survey 2, where there were limited improvements, we realised we needed to make some changes to the GSP Committee structure. As a result, we added more employee and Unison Network representatives. Senior management also become more involved, and were 100% supportive of the programme. Again we received over 100 recommendations from the workshops, but this time the GSP committee were able to identify key target areas that could be addressed. These were:

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- Quick wins (i.e. actions that could be completed immediately or within 2-3 months),
- Training,
- Staff issues,
- Second cousin perception (between our depots in the Rotorua and Taupo regions, and civil business operation),
- Communications, and
- Audit/assessment process.

Unison Facilitators were assigned to each of the above categories, each held accountable for investigating these areas of concern and implementing an action plan.

Initially the GSP Committee meetings were held fortnightly, and at each meeting one of the categories were addressed by the facilitator's. The meeting location rotated across our regions, and the frequency of meetings reduced once the key target areas were addressed.

Communication flyers were distributed to all staff following each meeting, including an update on the 'open', 'closed' and 'work in progress' actions the GSP committee were working on.

After 12 months of regular meetings, the GSP committee had completed 117 actions, which was deemed worthy of a celebration.

## **Key Learnings from our GSP journey**

In summary the key learnings that we experienced, which contributed to the significant improvements in our results were:

- Recognising the need to involve field staff as part of the solution to improve our safety performance.
- Involving the same employee representatives on the GSP Committee, as they then communicated to their peers on the positive changes made by the committee.
- Establishing a working agreement for the GSP Committee meetings. This allows open, honest and constructive conversations between employee, supervisor, management and executive management representatives at the GSP Committee meetings.
- Unison Contracting Services (service provider) and Unison Networks (asset owner) working together on safety issues.
- Addressing issues that were not directly safety related, but impacted on employee engagement.
- Accountability and 100% support from the executive management team.
- Employed people with both technical skills and people management skills into leadership roles.
- Improving communications by asking field staff what will work for them.
- Focus on addressing key themes/topics rather than 'everything all at once'.
- Having an excellent facilitator from Orange Umbrella<sup>®</sup>, and a UCSL Manager as the GSP Committee 'champion'.
- Ensuring all staff are kept up to date on the progress of the GSP committee via update flyers and articles in our company weekly staff newsletters.
- Celebrating success.

Unison facilitators were assigned to each of the above categories, each held accountable for investigating these areas of concern and implementing an action plan.

## Current GSP Status

A GSP Committee has been established following the third survey. Again, as with the second survey, we were able to identify key target areas from the recommendations received from the follow-up workshops. These were:

- Quick wins (i.e. actions that could be completed immediately or within 2-3 months),
- Bill of materials/stores issues,
- Job reviews (both pre and post),
- Resourcing issues,
- Equipment compliance testing process,
- Project orientation (clear delineation between foreman, supervisor and project management roles).

We have amended our GSP Committee working agreement to include accountability to all members to complete agreed actions as per the timeframes. This was a learning following survey two, where some actions took longer to complete than needed to.

Unison has also launched a culture initiative throughout its various companies with the key objective being 'One Vision, One Team'. This has been established to deal with the culture concerns raised through the GSP process and uses the GSP model, in particular the workshop sessions framework.

## Conclusion

The GSP has provided UCSL with a tool to move from focusing purely on compliance to a more culture, human behaviours approach, which has resulted in significant improvements in UCSL's safety performance.

Safety compliance will always be essential, given the nature of our business operations. What we have learnt from the GSP process is that it is important to involve field staff in addressing issues, some of which are not safety related, to improve not only safety performance but also quality and productivity. We are now seeing field staff raising issues with solutions to their Managers, where previously they would have just raised an issue, and expected management to resolve it for them.

UCSL is committed to continuously improving its safety performance and culture. We have already seen significant improvements from using the GSP programme, and expect to see more over the coming years. Having other similar companies in our industry participating in the GSP programme not only allows the industry to work together to improve safety performance, but to also work together on common issues and benchmark against ourselves.