

Managing Health and Safety through Organisational Change

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1. Introduction

Change at any level within an organisation may raise the risk of increased occupational health (e.g. work-related stress) or safety issues if not managed effectively. Such issues may occur during the change or emerge in the longer term as a result of the changes. Such issues may arise during major changes or during a period where a small number of minor changes happen in rapid succession.

This document provides high-level guidance for Leadership and Employees involved in managing organisational change. This document is designed to help mitigate the impact of change by identifying key areas to focus on and providing guidance on what processes should be maintained throughout the change period.

The seven key areas identified as requiring continuous focus have been identified by independent research and a common understanding of potential risks within the electricity networks sector. These areas are:



The intention should be to achieve a link between leadership decisions and the potential effect on health and safety in the working environment.

This document is set out in the form of a number of key principles that should be considered before embarking on any significant change. These principles are based on a common understanding of significant hazards within the electricity networks sector and accepted principles on how the risks arising from these hazards are managed. The principles aim to achieve a link between decisions taken at senior levels in an organisation that may potentially have an effect on health and safety at the “sharp end” and essentially comprise an aide-mémoire to help ensure there is no loss of corporate memory.

This document is not a substitute for individual company management systems and procedures. Via the ENA SHE Committee and through National HESAC ENA Member Companies will continue to share examples of good practice and lessons learned regarding organisational change.

2. Definitions

Organisational Change:

Changes in the provisions for people, plant, equipment, tools, premises and processes which have the potential to introduce significant risk to occupational health and safety. Such changes might include:

- Significantly reducing or increasing employee numbers;
- Combining departments;
- Moving premises;
- Significant changes to job roles and responsibilities;
- Introduction of “self-managed teams”;
- Multi-skilling;
- Centralisation or dispersal of functions;
- Changes to communication systems;
- Acquisitions and mergers;
- Changing from core staff to contractors or vice versa;
- Utilising multi-national work forces.

Significant Risk:

Any potential event associated with an ENA Member Company’s activity that could result in the death or serious injury to an employee, contractor or member of the public.

3. Key Principles

1. The change team should comprise competent people who are allocated sufficient time and other resources to plan and implement the change in a manner that does not compromise occupational health and/or safety either directly or indirectly. The resources and timescales allocated to the change process should be proportionate to the complexity or scale of the change.
2. The health and safety implications of any change should be assessed ahead of the change process.
3. Business activities and functions that are critical to health and safety, such as training, audit and safety management should be identified and provisions made for these to continue to function effectively throughout the entire change process.
4. Any additional risks that may arise during the transitional period between the old system and the new one must also be carefully assessed and managed.
5. In addition to any statutory responsibility to consult with staff and their representatives about proposed changes, it is recommended that staff should be adequately consulted throughout the process about health and safety issues that may be foreseeable.
6. In addition to risks to personal safety, risks to occupational health (e.g. stress due to increased workloads) should be assessed.
7. Changes in roles should be defined so that it is clear what people are responsible for and what they are not responsible for; reporting lines should be clear. Staff with new or changed roles should receive adequate training and experienced support and/or supervision until they are fully trained and competent.
8. There should be a strong and active leadership from the top. Leaders should ensure that the scope and reasons for the change are clearly explained to anyone affected.
9. Once a change has been decided upon and agreed, it should be implemented as quickly as is safe and practical to do so, in order that any worry or concern by staff affected is kept to a minimum.
10. Safety critical tasks and responsibilities should be properly transferred into any new organisational structure in a controlled manner so that there is no gap between the old and the new.
11. Potential increased workload during the transition phase will also need to be considered e.g. adequate cover to allow training etc.
12. The effects of the changes should be reviewed throughout the process to ensure that safety critical processes are still functioning properly – it may be appropriate for these checks to continue until any change has “bedded in”.
13. Learning points should be fed into future change management projects.

4. Further Information

Leading health and safety at work – Leadership actions for Directors and Board Members
HSE/loD (INDG 417)

Fair Change: Prospect guide to organisational change

Organisational change and major accident hazards (HSE Chemical Information Sheet No.
CHI57)

HSE Human Factors Briefing Note No. 11: “Organisational Change”

Successful Health and Safety Management (HSG65)

Managing the causes of work-related stress: a step-by-step approach to using the
Management standards (HSG218)