



# Courtenell

Work Health & Safety Training and Consulting

02 **9552 2066**  
train@courtenell.com.au



## How to Increase the Benefits of WHS Consultation

Would you like to improve the effectiveness of WHS consultation in your workplace? Or perhaps you want to be sure that mandatory consultation is being satisfied? This article suggests an easy way by which you can review the state of consultation in your workplace. The review can help to reveal any areas that do not match up to your expectations or requirements and assist you to improve the situation.

### The Benefits of WHS Consultation

It is quite reasonable for a PCBU to expect to receive an appropriate level of benefits by complying with the requirements of the WHS Act. As you know a PCBU must consult, so far as is reasonably practicable, with workers who carry out work for the business or undertaking and who are (or are likely to be) directly affected by a health and safety matter (Section 47 WHS Act). And if the PCBU and other duty holders have a WHS duty about the same matter then they have a duty to consult with each other (Section 46 WHS Act).

Most medium to large businesses use health and safety committees and/or HSRs to consult with workers. Managers and Supervisors are also involved in the consultation process and are important players.

The duty to consult is based on the recognition that worker input and participation improves decision-making about health and safety matters and assists in reducing work-related injuries and disease.

### How to Review the Benefits of WHS Consultation

One way of reviewing consultation in your workplace is to check on whether you are receiving appropriate benefits from your consultation process.

If you use the list of benefits below as a checklist you may identify one or more areas in your workplace where the expected benefits of consultation are not yet apparent. This list of benefits is based upon material in SafeWork NSW's, *Consultation, Co-operation and Co-ordination Code of Practice*.

You could reasonably expect that because you have HSRs and/or a H&S Committee and a functional consultation process, that your workplace will have benefits such as;

- Well informed decisions that were made about how the work should be carried out safely because you drew on the knowledge, experience expertise and skills of your workers.

- Higher worker awareness and commitment – because workers have been actively involved in developing health and safety decisions.
- Improved ability of workers to identify and control hazards.
- Positive working relationships – because understanding the views of others leads to greater co-operation and trust.
- Increased attention and motivation of workers to work safely.
- Improved safety culture.
- Gaps in managing health and safety risks are handled when you share responsibility for health and safety on the same matter with other duty holders. On these occasions, consulting, co-operating and co-ordinating activities with these other duty holders can prevent situations such as:
  - a lack of understanding of how the activities of each person may add to the hazards and risks to which others may be exposed
  - duty holders assume that someone else is taking care of the health and safety matter
  - the person who takes action is not the best person to do so.
- The PCBU and other duty holders are in a better position to identify hazards and implement workable solutions to health and safety matters.
- A safer workplace – a significant reduction in near misses, injuries and illness is achieved because everyone involved in the work activity communicates with each other to identify hazards and risks, talks about any health and safety concerns and works together to find effective solutions and implements these. This includes cooperation between the people who manage or control the work and those who carry out the work or who are affected by the work.

By the end of this list you may have identified one or more items that need to be improved. Investigating and consulting with others about each deficient item will enable you to see what actions you need to take to improve the situation.

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