

## TECHNICAL NOTE #12

### Leading practice for Health & Safety at work

Protecting the health and safety of employees and/or members of the public from potential hazards is an essential component of risk management that must be led by the Board in every organisation.

#### TECHNICAL CONTRIBUTOR

Nico Pienaar  
Director, ASPASA  
[www.aspasa.co.za](http://www.aspasa.co.za)





## LEADING PRACTICE FOR HEALTH & SAFETY AT WORK

This document outlines the requirements for effective leadership in health and safety, in both large and small organisations. These guidelines are intended to assist all decision-makers in senior management, i.e. directors, governors, trustees, officers and their equivalents in the private, public and third sectors with the successful implementation of a Health and Safety Management Programme within their respective organisations.

Protecting the health and safety of employees and/or members of the public from potential hazards is an essential component of risk management that must be led by the Board in every organisation. Failure to acknowledge these aspects as a key business risk can have catastrophic results, as has been seen in the many high profile safety cases over the years that have been rooted by the ignorance of leadership.

Legislation places the onus of health and safety on organisations and their employees. However, members of the Board are entrusted with both individual and collective responsibilities, and can be held liable should these duties be breached.

The enclosed guidelines will assist today's business leader in identifying the most appropriate methods to promote health and safety in the workplace, thereby fulfilling essential legal obligations and the best interests of the organisation.

### FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

The fundamental principles underpinning good governance and best practice in health and safety management include:

#### **Strong Active Leadership**

- Visible, active commitment from all Board members
- Effective 'downward' communication systems and management structures
- Integration of good health and safety management into business decisions

#### **Worker Involvement**

- Engaging the workforce in the effectiveness of health and safety conditions
- Effective 'upward' communications
- Providing high quality training

#### **Assessment and Review**

- Identifying and managing health and safety risks
- Accessing (and following) competent advice
- Monitoring, reporting and performance assessments



## AGENDA

### 1. Core Actions of the Board and Board Members

- Identified activities should correlate directly to the legal duties of the organisation
- Defined actions should set the standard for Health & Safety

### 2. Guidelines

- Identification and implementation of core actions
- Practical procedures to achieve set outcome

### 3. Case Studies

- Referenced case studies to be relevant to most sectors

## BENEFITS OF HEALTH & SAFETY @WORK

Addressing health and safety should not be seen as a regulatory burden, as it presents significant opportunities. Such benefits include:

- Reduced Costs and Reduced Risk.**  
Lower employee absence and turnover rates. Fewer accidents. Less threat of legal action
- Improved Standing.**  
Builds the confidence of customers, suppliers and partners
- Enhanced Reputation.**  
Corporate social responsibility recognised by investors, customers and communities
- Increased Productivity.**  
Employees are healthier and better motivated.

## COST OF POOR HEALTH & SAFETY @WORK

Statistics reveal the human and financial costs on businesses per annum by failing to address health and safety in the workplace:

- a) Millions of working days are lost due to work-related illness and injury
- b) Thousands of people die from occupational diseases
- c) Thousands of workers are injured at their place of work

Organisations can incur further costs, such as uninsured losses and loss of reputation.



## LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY OF EMPLOYERS

Health and safety laws state that employers must:

- a) Assess risks to employees, customers, partners and any other persons who may be affected by the activities of the company
- b) Arrange for the effective planning, organisation, control, monitoring and review of preventative and protective measures

It is essential to:

- c) Have a written health and safety policy if the company has 5+ employees
- d) Ensure all personnel have access to competent health and safety information
- e) Consult employees with regard to potential risks in the workplace and the relevant preventive and protective measures taken.

Failure to comply with this legislation can have serious consequences for both the organisation and responsible individuals. Sanctions include fines, imprisonment and disqualification.

*“Health and safety is integral to the success of an organisation. Board members who do not show leadership in this area are failing in their moral duty as Directors and are damaging the credibility of their organisation.”*

*“An organisation will never be able to achieve the highest standards of health and safety management without the involvement of its Directors. External stakeholders will Observe the lack of direction should the necessary measures not be in place.”*

*The attitude toward health and safety is determined by senior management, and not by the size of the organisation.”*





## PLAN

The Board should set the direction for effective health and safety management through the implementation of a health and safety policy that is much more than a document - but an integral part of the organisation's culture, values and performance standards.

All members of the Board are to ensure that the duties and benefits of health and safety are clearly communicated throughout the organisation. The Executive Directors are to develop policies to avoid hazards in the workplace, and must be able to respond quickly when such issues arise. Non-executives are to ensure that all aspects of health and safety are properly addressed.

### Core Actions

To agree on a policy, the Board will need to be aware of the significant risks confronting their organisation. The policy should set out the role of the Board, as well as that of its individual members, in leading the health and safety process. This includes:

- Owning and understanding the key issues involved
- Deciding on how best to communicate, promote and champion health and safety

The health and safety policy is a 'living' document that should evolve as and when new developments take place, such as major organisational changes, restructuring or acquisition of the company, among others.

### Recommended Practice

- a) Health and safety should appear regularly on the agenda of Board meetings
- b) The Chief Executive Officer can ensure the necessary leadership, however some find it useful to nominate one of their employees as the health and safety 'champion'
- c) The presence a health and safety Director sitting on the Board can give strong message that the issue is being taken seriously and its strategic importance is understood
- d) Setting targets helps to define what the board is seeking to achieve
- e) A non-executive Director can be appointed to scrutinise the process, in an effort to bypass significant health and safety risks.

### Corporate Governance

For many organisations, health and safety is a corporate governance issue. The Board should integrate health and safety into the main governance structures, and appoint subcommittees for key areas such as risk, remuneration and audit.



## Do

Delivery depends on an effective management system to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of employees, customers and members of the public. Organisations should aim to protect people by introducing management systems and practices that ensure risks are dealt with sensibly, responsibly and proportionately.

### Core Actions

To ensure full 'ownership' of the management plan, the Board must ensure that:

- a) All health and safety requirements are adequately sourced
- b) Professional and competent advice is sought
- c) Risks assessments are carried out
- d) Employees and representatives get involved in decision-making related to their well-being
- e) All implications are explored before introducing new processes, working practices and personnel, with adequate resources and expert advice employed, where necessary.

All Board decisions must be made in the context of the organisation's health and safety policy; it is important to 'design-in' health and safety when implementing change.

### Recommended Practice

- a) Leadership is more effective if Board members can reinforce the health and safety policy through their own actions, such as complying with all safety measures on the 'shop floor' and addressing any breaches immediately.
- b) Health and safety is to be considered when appointing senior managers
- c) The implementation of procurement standards for goods, equipment and services can prevent the introduction of expensive health and safety hazards.
- d) The health and safety arrangements of partners, key suppliers and contractors should be assessed, as their performance could adversely affect yours.
- e) Setting up a separate risk management or health and safety committee as a subset of the Board, and chaired by a senior executive, can allow for key issues to be addressed thus saving time and effort that would otherwise be wasted on trivial risk and unnecessary bureaucracy.
- f) Providing health and safety training to the Board can promote understanding and knowledge of the key issues in the organisation.



- g) Supporting worker involvement in health and safety can improve participation and reinforce commitment.

## CHECK

Monitoring and reporting are vital parts of an effective health and safety culture. Management systems must follow the board to receive both specific (e.g. incident-led) and routine reports on the performance of health and safety policy.

Much day-to-day health and safety information needs be reported only at the time of a formal review. But only a strong system of monitoring can ensure that the formal review can proceed as planned - and that relevant events in the interim are brought to the board's attention.

### Core Actions

The board should ensure that:

- a) Appropriate weight is given to reporting on both preventive information, i.e. progress of training and maintenance programmes, and incident data, such as accident and sickness absence rates;
- b) Periodic audits on the effectiveness of management structures and risk controls for health and safety are carried out;
- c) The impact of changes, such as the introduction of new procedures, work processes or products, and/or any other major health and safety failure, is reported as soon as possible to the board;
- d) Procedures are in place to adjust to new or amended legal requirements, in addition to responding to other external developments and events

### Recommended Practice

- a) Effective monitoring of sickness, absenteeism and workplace health can alert the Board to underlying issues that could seriously impact on performance or result in accidents and long-term illness.
- b) Accumulation of health and safety data can allow the board to benchmark the organisation's performance against others in its sector.
- c) Appraisals of senior managers can include assessments of their contribution to health and safety performance.
- d) The Board can receive regular reports on the health and safety performance and actions of contractors.



- e) Some organisations can achieve greater support for health and safety by involving workers in monitoring.

## ACT

A formal review in health and safety performance allows the Board to establish whether the essential health and safety principles - strong and active leadership, worker involvement, assessment and review have been embedded in the organisation – and whether the system is effective in managing risk and protecting people.

### Core Actions

The Board should review health and safety performance annually:

- a) Examine whether the health and safety policy reflects the organisation’s current priorities, plan and targets
- b) Examine whether risk management and other health and safety systems have effectively been reported to the board
- c) Report on health and safety limitations, and the impact thereof on board and management decisions
- d) Decide on actions to address weaknesses and the systems required to monitor implementation
- e) Consider immediate reviews in light of major shortcomings or events.

### Recommended Practice

- a) Performance on health and safety aspects, as well as the wellbeing of employees can be recorded in the organisation’s annual reports for investors and stakeholders to review.
- b) Board members can make extra ‘shop floor’ visits to gather information for formal review.
- c) Good health and safety performance can be acknowledged at central and local levels.

### For further information:

The Clay Brick Association of South Africa

Website: [www.claybrick.org](http://www.claybrick.org)