

Risk insight

Introduction

The primary role of a supervisor is to function effectively within a supporting managerial position, overseeing effective performance in compliance with both organisational arrangements and legal compliance.

The supervisor role is regarded as a critical appointment, with a study commissioned by the HSE observing that management and supervision were considered to be the most significant organisational factors affecting accidents, yet most organisations fail to fully understand this link. (Bomel 2003).

Furthermore, from an insurance perspective QBE also recognise that deficient supervisory practices are a frequent contributing factor in a number of claims. These include condoning unsafe acts and conditions, participating or even leading in unsafe practices and failing to positively intervene when appropriate.

A supervisor is broadly defined as: 'A person directly supervising work activities, with responsibility for putting people to work, briefing their team on how to carry out their work and ensuring that they are carrying out their work safely and identify any emerging risks through active monitoring.'

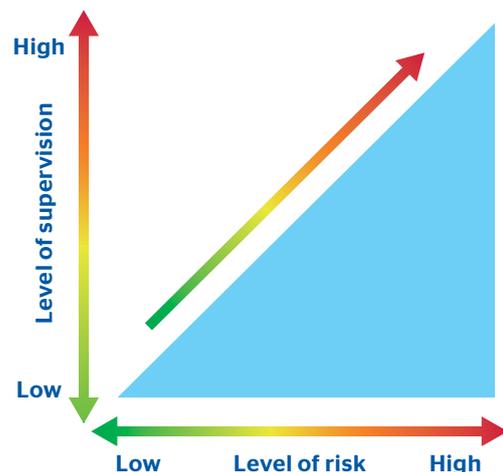
Policy and Procedures

All organisations have a legal duty to provide "such information, training and supervision as is necessary to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of his employees". This requires all organisations to provide supervision of their own employees, inclusive of agency appointments.

It is recognised that for supervision to be effective it must be clearly identified within an organisation's safety management system, supported with clear dissemination through all levels and facets of the organisation, policy, roles & responsibilities, guidance etc and identified within all monitoring systems.

Supervision is an essential part of monitoring safe working acts and conditions. The level of supervision provided should reflect the level of risk of the activity being carried out, the environment in which the task is being undertaken and the skills, knowledge, training and experience of the workers concerned.

Identification and subsequent supervisory requirements need to be risk based and reasonably practicable for the level of risk associated with the activity. The chart below shows the greater the risk associated with the task and situations, then the higher the level of supervision required.



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Increased supervision levels must be provided if the work team are young, inexperienced or starting a new work activity. Even experienced workers may need an appropriate level of supervision if they do not have some or all the skills, knowledge, training and experience required for the job and the risks involved. Workers should always know how to get supervisory help, even when a supervisor is not present.

Other factors that should be considered when assessing the level of supervision required include:

- > The level of individuals' safety awareness.
- > The level of knowledge to complete the activity or task.
- > Physical capability.
- > Hazards and the associated level of risk.
- > Number of work activities or work fronts.
- > Location and environment of work activities including distances and remoteness i.e., workfront's in different locations inclusive of level of public interface.
- > Number of people, plant, equipment and materials involved in each activity.
- > Duration of works, time pressures, shift patterns and reactive situations.

As part of the activity assessment to determine appropriate levels of supervision, it is required to define the remit of the supervisor for that specific activity. This requires clear identification if the supervisor is required to be a working supervisor or a non-working supervisor.

Fundamental elements of the assessment must review and determine the elements of the task/activity and workforce capability, determining High, Medium or Low levels of required supervision.

Working Supervisors will usually be part of a gang and in place to support both the delivery and monitoring of low-risk activities. This involves being part of the labour resource but also taking the lead for items such as task briefings and low to medium level monitoring of the individuals under their area of responsibility. Medium levels of monitoring would be required for transient teams working in multiple locations for low-risk activities, with a dedicated supervisor covering a geographical area.

Non-Working Supervisors (NWS) will be required for high-risk activities to ensure application of work-based controls and constant monitoring to identify emerging concerns. NWS will be able to take a holistic view of safety performance with the benefit of not being distracted by completing laboured tasks.

Summary

In summary, it is vitally important (from a claims defence and legal compliance perspective) that a proportionate approach to supervision is assessed, and more importantly, applied and monitored for all activities undertaken.

To support this, the list below provides a summary of the business processes that need be routinely reviewed and monitored to ensure effective application of onsite supervision:

- > The supervisory arrangements in place must be assessed and appraised to ensure that all key supervisor responsibilities are clearly defined and appropriately allocated.
- > The right people for the job must be selected and provided with suitable training. Relevant individuals must have the necessary skills and aptitude for supervisory activities, such as planning, communication, delegation and leadership etc. with a thorough understanding of hazard identification and control measures, along with the experience and credibility to gain respect from others.

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- > Not only is the provision of suitable and sufficient supervision an important compliance issue but it is also a key consideration within a civil liability claim. Achieving compliance does not necessarily mean that organisations will successfully defend a claim, although it is a good starting point. The burden of proof for a claimant to successfully claim is less than for criminal cases. Therefore, we encourage organisations to achieve best practice so that if a claim is made QBE are in the best possible position to defend liability. Supervisors are responsible for discharging duties that should not only improve risk control directly, but which should result in the generation of evidence that is vital when attempting to defend a claim. The sort of direct evidence associated with supervision and which would assist with the management of a claim includes (a non-exhaustive list):
 - Generation and communication of risk assessments.
 - Recorded workplace inspections and any other monitoring processes.
 - Initial management of an accident scene e.g., statements, photographs, preservation of the accident scene, retention of task related documentation.
 - Ensuring safety related information is communicated on a signed receipt basis.
 - Ensuring that employees who are put to work are trained and competent.
 - > Supervision is a broad and important role within an organisation. Ultimately the supervisor coordinates the point of work delivery of that which is set out within the health and safety management system. From a claims risk, resilience perspective organisations must ensure that supervisors are suitably developed, so that they discharge their duties correctly as this will have a direct bearing on both incident prevention and any subsequent civil liability claim.
 - > Supervisors must be supported in their roles and responsibilities, with achievable targets set and visible support given.
 - > Supervisors must be allowed the time and the opportunity to interact with others to fulfil all their supervisory responsibilities.
 - > The performance of supervisors must be measured, monitored, and reviewed throughout to measure effectiveness. QBE have developed an Organisational Management System Review and Supervisor Observational Assessment Tool to support clients in achieving this.
- QBE have developed a series of Risk Essential Guides and Template to help clients to assess and implement their Supervisor framework.

Bomet Consortium (2003). The factors and causes contributing to fatal accidents 1996/97 to 2000/01. Summary Report. HSE Task ID BOM\0040. C998\01\117R, Rev B, November 2003.

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