

Health and safety performance improvement

Phil Parkes, Chief Operating Officer at WorkSafe New Zealand, talked at ComplyWith Unplugged about the drive to improve New Zealand's health and safety performance. Here are some of the key messages from Phil's presentation.

Some improvement but must do better

Recent statistics indicate that workplace health and safety in New Zealand has improved significantly since the Pike River Coal Mine disaster.

The rates of work-related fatal, and serious non-fatal, injury have been decreasing since 2011. A possible reason for this is WorkSafe's targeting of four priority sectors: forestry; agriculture; construction; and manufacturing.

But, we still have a way to go. Our work-related fatal injury rate remains poor when compared with other first world countries, particularly Australia and the UK.

Broadening the health and safety focus beyond acute harm

Phil explained that while New Zealand has approximately 60 to 70 'acute incident' workplace deaths per year – for every one of these there are around 10 more deaths caused by chronic occupational disease.

There are also about 30,000 cases of serious ill health caused by workplace risks and an even higher number of unreported cases. More needs to be done to manage the workplace risks causing ill health.

A health and safety performance shift is required

Phil shared a maturity model which indicated that, although progress has been made, there is a lot more work to be done before New Zealand can claim to have an interdependent, fully mature health and safety culture.

So, how do we get there? WorkSafe's focus for 2018 and beyond is on the three tenets of effective health and safety:

- Leadership
- Employee Engagement
- Risk Management.

The three tenets inform the main health and safety goal for any organisation, which must be to achieve a safe operational culture.

Like Francois Barton from the Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum who also spoke at Unplugged, Phil emphasised that right culture is key. It's a fallacy to believe an effective health and safety culture can exist separately from the rest of an organisation's culture. It comes from the top – senior management must recognise that, as Phil says, "*safety must be central for operational excellence*".

What gets measured matters

To help organisations measure their health and safety performance and learn how to improve, WorkSafe (with ACC and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment) has launched the SafePlus toolkit.

SafePlus includes resources and guidance, as well as access to onsite assessment and advisory services. SafePlus will have an online self-assessment tool added to it in mid-2018.

Check out [SafePlus](#).