



# Queensland Safe Work and Return to Work Awards 2017

Shane Webcke *Safety Ambassador*

## Safe Work and Return to Work Awards 2017 example entry Category four – Most significant improvement to work health and safety performance

### 1. What was the work health and safety issue and how did you address it?

Work on the Richlands to Springfield Project officially began in October 2011, and by early 2012 construction was well underway. Even though the safety performance was within the previously defined target limits, management decided that any injury on the project was not acceptable and that something needed to be done to lift the safety culture on the project.

Despite performance meeting acceptable limits, there was a trend in minor injuries, an increase in the recordable injury frequency rate (RIFR) and feedback from site supervisors about complacent worker behaviour and attitude. Management recognised that these factors were early warning signs of a potentially serious incident. It was felt that higher goals needed to be set and the project should aim for outstanding safety performance, not just acceptable performance.

Management believed that this issue could be addressed by setting new safety benchmarks and aiming for zero injuries. They decided immediate action was needed to proactively engage workforce, sub-contractors, suppliers and office staff to improve safety performance and awareness.

In May 2012, TrackStar Alliance launched a new safety initiative called Steps Towards Zero that would run until project completion. Primarily, the initiative aims to reduce workplace injuries and incidents by changing attitudes and creating a 'safety first' culture. Steps Towards Zero is inclusive of the workforce and was built on the basis of continuous feedback to improve outcomes by involving the entire project team in a process of continually developing and changing the plan rather than setting out on a preordained process. The initiative focusses each person's attention on their responsibility and accountability for their own safety and wellbeing and that of their colleagues.

#### Risk management processes

Particular attention was applied to the planning and execution of the construction activities, with the focus being on managing risk. This is demonstrated through the four tier risk management processes applied at the following stages of the project:

1. Principal Risk Review – Identifying the high level risks associated across the whole project;
2. Work Area Plans – Identifying where the principal risks exist in a particular section or work area and specifying minimum standards or controls for those risks;
3. Work Packs – Identifying how the principal risks will be managed for a particular section or work area; and
4. Safe Work Method Statements – clearly describing how the activity is to be performed and how the risks will be managed by the individual worker.

Review and monitoring of these processes in the field enabled the management team to better understand the risks involved in the work and focus on continual improvement. This vigilance resulted in reducing the risk of injury to the project team.

Key features of the Steps Towards Zero initiative include:

- Targeting zero injuries – Steps Towards Zero sets this ambitious target because an acceptable quota of injuries (even a low one) implies that it's 'okay' for people to get hurt. The core philosophy is that all injuries are preventable so a target of zero is achievable.
- Empowering individuals – The project team (workforce, sub-contractors and office staff) is empowered to be proactive in maintaining a safe workplace. "If you see it, it's your responsibility to do something about it".
- Creating a positive reporting culture – Emphasis is placed on increasing corrective actions assigned through Job Safety and Environment Observations (JSEOs). In the past, corrective actions were often assigned retrospectively, after an incident occurred. Steps Towards Zero encourages workers to proactively identify potential problems and assign actions to correct them – not simply 'observe and leave it for someone else'.
- Reporting of near misses – Instead of viewing near misses as a negative, they are considered 'free kicks' that can be proactively mitigated.
- Managing workplace incidents – A sense of 'urgency' was created when responding to and managing all workplace incidents, no matter how minor, to demonstrate a commitment to sustaining a safe workplace.
- Communicating openly – Management is committed to transparency and sharing information with the project team in an open and timely manner.
- Influencing long-term change – Long-term change to the attitude and mindset of workers will benefit the project, individuals, their families and the industry.

Key activities (supporting evidence attached)

Steps Towards Zero is an ongoing initiative with activities running regularly throughout the life of the project to maintain momentum and reinforce messaging. Key activities include:

- Early consultation.
- Meeting with and engaging sub-contractors, suppliers and workforce in an inclusive program was essential for Steps Towards Zero to succeed. Therefore, a site-wide consultative approach was adopted from the beginning to obtain their buy-in, feedback and enthusiasm. Participants willingly provided their commitment, support and advice to make the program relevant and engaging for the project team.
- Brand development – The Steps Towards Zero brand was developed to reflect the shared ideology that responsibility for safety lays across genders, roles, job types and locations. Symbolically, the logo represents the project team taking steps towards an injury free workplace. The Steps Towards Zero logo is prominently displayed across the project to maintain an ongoing presence and keep the initiative top of mind.
- Tagline competition – The project team was encouraged to enter a competition to find a tagline for the new Steps Towards Zero logo. Over 110 entries were received during the two week competition with the winning tagline, "Let's make every step a safe one", selected by anonymous ballot.
- Steps Towards Zero charter – A charter was developed to reinforce the project team's commitment to the initiative and is displayed prominently across the project. The project team and senior members from all companies (both suppliers and subcontractors) signed the charter statement "I commit to targeting zero injuries".
- Steps Towards Zero taskforce – The safety committee was re-branded Steps Towards Zero taskforce and membership widened to include representatives out in the field such as sub-contractors and workforce, as well as TrackStar Alliance office staff.
- Tracking injury-free days – All work sites have prominent signage tracking the current number of injury-free days. 'Injury' is defined as anything that required first aid treatment

regardless of how minor. It was felt that lifting the level of attention, investigation and action around these minor injuries would ensure that significant ones did not occur. An update is also provided at daily pre-starts to encourage a one-team approach in achieving new project records for injury-free days.

- Non-negotiables – A set of six ‘non-negotiables’ were implemented based on the most significant safety risks on the project. This was done to protect the project team from serious injury or death. Breaches of these non-negotiable rules are taken very seriously and reflect TrackStar Alliance’s commitment to the safety of the project team. These rules are communicated in site inductions, posters, pre-starts and toolbox talks.
- Steps Towards Zero barbecue – Site-wide barbecues are held regularly with the aim of bringing everyone together to reinforce the initiative and maintain enthusiasm. At these barbecues, guest speakers share their stories of decisions they made which resulted in injuries and the subsequent impact on their families, friends and their livelihood. These stories from ‘real’ people have a significant impact and highlight the reality of the risks the project team faces every day. The barbecues also involve safety updates from management, safety award presentations and guest representatives from the Department of Workplace Health and Safety.
- Safety awards – Outstanding contributions to project safety are recognised through an awards program with winners presented with a gift at the barbecues.
- ‘My reason for working safe’ survey – A survey was undertaken to prompt the project team’s thinking about why a ‘safety first’ culture is so important, and realise it’s not just about following the rules because you’re told to. The survey asked “My reason for working safe is...”.
- Responses to the survey varied from spending time with spouses and children, to fishing weekends with mates, and has shaped the Steps Towards Zero initiative going forward.
- Steps Towards Zero newsletter – An internal newsletter aimed at keeping the project team informed features updates from the Steps Towards Zero taskforce, photos, award recipients and other safety-related content.
- Celebrating achievements – Celebrating the achievement of targets or milestones helps maintain enthusiasm and focus over the long-term. When a new injury-free day record was recently achieved, each member of the project team received a branded cooler bag as a recognition gift and celebrated with site-based barbecues.

## **2. How did your organisation go about implementing the changes?**

The success of Steps Towards Zero is the result of the project team working together:

- Management – Identifying the issue, concept development of Steps Towards Zero, encouraging engagement of sub-contractors and workforce, ongoing leadership of the initiative, participation in all activities, continuous improvements in risk management planning and monitoring.
- Safety team – Facilitating sub-contractor and workforce involvement, tracking injury-free days and updating signage, integrating changes into pre-existing safety procedures, ongoing implementation of the initiative, planning and scheduling the lead indicator activities, tracking the close out of corrective actions.
- Communication team – Coordinating and reinforcing the Steps Towards Zero branding, producing branded collateral, facilitating the tagline competition and ‘The reason I work safe’ survey, internally promoting the initiative.
- Workforce and sub-contractors – Assisting with concept development, providing representation on taskforce, participating in all activities, signing of and committing to Charter.
- Office staff – Providing representation on taskforce, participating in all activities, signing of and committing to Charter.

By improving safety performance on the project, Steps Towards Zero mitigates the potential of investigative shutdowns and union action due to safety incidents.

This improved safety performance resulting from positive attitudinal change amongst the project team ensures that the project is completed on time, and in turn allows the client to meet their obligation to deliver the infrastructure to the community.

Safety performance is monitored and evaluated on a regular basis – daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly – depending on the purpose of the reporting. Steps Towards Zero is monitored and evaluated on its effectiveness as part of this reporting and specifically looks at:

- risk assessments
- safety observations
- actions from JSEOs
- reporting of near misses and procedural breaches
- Reportable Injury Frequency Rate, Lost Time Injuries and First Aid Injuries
- anecdotal evidence from site
- feedback and surveys
- nominations for safety awards.

### **3. Explain how the changes have improved work health and safety. How have you ensured this improvement will be sustained?**

Steps Towards Zero was implemented to curtail the trend in minor injuries and minimise the likelihood of a serious incident occurring. Most of the injuries that occurred prior to Steps Towards Zero were preventable and could have been avoided with a higher level of vigilance and a 'safety first' mindset. For example, a worker getting a splinter or small cut to the hand could have been prevented by wearing gloves.

The implementation of Steps Towards Zero represented a significant improvement in the attitudes and culture of the project team. This is demonstrated through:

- a reduction in the number of injuries resulting from carelessness or inattention in a matter of weeks
- the project team felt empowered and encouraged to actively participate in maintaining a safe workplace, and not just go through the motions
- a significant increase in non-damage related incidents being reported, with most month's lag indicators showing >50% of all incidents result in no damage to workers, equipment, community or the environment
- a significant increase in the planned lead indicator activities (eg: JSEOs, Area and activity inspections) ensuring the specified risk controls are in place to effectively manage the identified hazards
- a change in safety observations emphasising actions and reporting of near misses mitigating potential issues before any damage is done
- significant improvements in the investigation of the incidents and the implementation of corrective actions to prevent reoccurrence.

Running Steps Towards Zero over the life of the project was important in instilling a long-term change to the attitudes and mindset of the project team.

The improvements resulting from the initiative is sustained through long-term and permanent changes in the project team translating into positive new habitual behaviours. The initiative has the ongoing support and guidance from the senior leadership team in order to maintain these improvements.

Key statistics demonstrating these improvements include:

- 186 per cent increase in corrective actions submitted – six months prior to Steps Towards Zero (Nov 2011 to Apr 2012) compared to six months after implementation of Steps Towards Zero (May 2012 to Oct 2012).
- Consistent lowering in RIFR since the high-point in April 2012 (prior to Steps Towards Zero).
- 74 per cent decrease in rolling 12 month RIFR (between Apr 2012 and Jun 2013).
- 75 per cent decrease in recordable injuries – prior to Steps Towards Zero (Oct 2011 to Apr 2012) compared to after implementation of Steps Towards Zero (May 2012 to Jun 2013).
- The top four ‘injury-free days’ occurred after implementing Steps Towards Zero (the highest ‘injury-free days’ prior to Steps Towards Zero is just 42 per cent of the overall record).
- The most serious injury that has occurred on the project was three stitches to an eyebrow after a drill jammed in a hole and hit the worker in the head whilst it rotated.

#### Qualitative

Feedback received from site supervisors and the safety team highlights improvements in attitudes and ‘safety first’ behaviours. For example, site supervisors report that workers now actively contribute to the discussion of safety topics at daily pre-start, rather than sitting back and listening to information.

A recent survey gathered feedback from the project team reflecting a positive safety culture:

- “The safest site I have ever worked on”.
- “Feels like a good safety culture on site”.
- “Systems seem to be working very well and supervision on site is well-managed”.
- “In general, safety is very good on site”.
- “I think this is a very safe site and a great place to work”.
- “Safety culture on site is good”.
- “Focus on safety is strong and obvious”.
- “You’re doing a fabulous job! BBQ is great – thanks guys!”

Other positive results from this survey include:

- 94 per cent said the guest speakers at the Steps Towards Zero barbecue makes them think about working safely.
- 92 per cent said the injury-free days target influences their safety behaviour.
- 99 per cent said they are disappointed when an injury occurs.

These results reflect the significant impact Steps Towards Zero has had in creating a ‘safety first’ culture and reducing injuries on the project. The initiative resulted in an immediate effect with improvements apparent from the very beginning. Even more important though, will be the sustained positive impact it will have over time for the benefit of the industry as a whole.

The Steps Towards Zero initiative is at the heart of the project’s safety culture and is built into the safety management system.

The initiative is reflected throughout the project's safety management system including:

- company KRAs and KPIs
- safety inductions
- job descriptions and individual KPIs
- principal risk reviews, work area plans, work packs and safe work method statements
- JSEOs
- area and activity inspections
- pre-starts and toolbox talks
- reporting procedures
- training and development.