

GUIDANCE ON EFFECTIVE WORKFORCE INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH AND SAFETY

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Workforce involvement (WFI) can be a complex and sensitive issue and it can be difficult to engage with workers or make involvement more effective. To help organisations within the petroleum and allied industries, practical guidance, for WFI, has been developed on behalf of the Energy Institute by Greenstreet Berman Ltd.

This paper introduces the issues surrounding WFI and describes the 3-step approach, case studies and assessment exercises detailed in the guidance. It also discusses how such an approach might be beneficial in improving health and safety, as well as bringing other benefits.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE): *“involving workers in health and safety leads to healthier and safer workplaces and produces a range of benefits for workers and managers”*¹.

This view is based on evidence from a considerable body of research and is shared by many other similarly respected organisations.

Guidance on workforce involvement (WFI) was developed on behalf of the Energy Institute (EI) by Greenstreet Berman Ltd (GSB). The key objective of the EI was to develop for publication:

“Simple petroleum and allied industries guidance on how to achieve effective workforce involvement. It should navigate users through the necessary steps on a pathway to effective workforce involvement, identifying available resources and inputs to assist attainment of each step.”

WFI can bring significant benefits. This is illustrated by a number of examples, identified during the development of the guidance:

- One organisation, in the high hazard industry, reported that increasing WFI was associated with a 50% reduction in reportable accidents²;
- Organisations with formal safety committees have reported 40–50% lower injury rates³;
- Occupational illness was lower when employees were involved in safety³;
- Around 50% of high performing companies use worker suggestions, ideas and feedback⁴;

- An organisation reported that when workers were involved in equipment review and design there was a reduction in material and overtime costs².

Involving workers in making decisions about health and safety makes sense because the people who carry out work are well placed to say how work might be improved. Workers have more direct experience of unsafe conditions and how it affects their job.

WFI can lead to these types of benefits for a number of reasons, for example:

- **Compliance is improved** – workers involved in the development and review of policies and procedures have an interest in maintaining the rules, they have helped to develop, and are more likely to support and comply with them;
- **Concern for safety is increased** – involvement highlights that everyone is responsible for safety, which in turn can mean individuals start to take greater responsibility for the health and safety of themselves and colleagues;
- **Morale and trust are improved** – working together can increase understanding and trust across an organisation;
- **Decision making is better** – decision making is better because, by involving workers, managers become more informed about the issues affecting their business.

The evidence for the benefits of WFI have led respected organisations, for example, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), to make WFI central to their philosophy on tackling health and safety:

There is also evidence that serious incidents have occurred, in the petroleum and allied industries, where lack of WFI in process safety may have been a contributory cause.

In March 2005, a catastrophic process accident at Texas City refinery in the US resulted in 15 deaths and more than 170 injuries. Investigations into this event and the subsequent report by Baker J et al⁵, concluded that: “... *Texas City, has not established a positive, trusting, and open environment with effective lines of communication between management and the workforce.*”

The report also stated that the organisations involved in these incidents were managing occupational safety particularly well, with very low personal injury rates. There was, however, an apparent imbalance between the effort put into personal injury versus major accident prevention. As illustrated by the following quote:

The organisation ... “*in recent years, has achieved significant improvement in personal safety performance, but did not emphasize process safety, mistakenly interpreting improving personal injury rates as an indication of acceptable process safety performance at its U.S. refineries*”

Interestingly this does not seem to be unique, with similar conclusions made by the investigators⁶ into a major incident at the Grangemouth complex in the UK during 2000.

“*Commendable success in managing personal injury rates down to a very low level, together with a failure to adequately distinguish these successes from process safety management. This imbalance between the effort put into personal injury versus major accident prevention was by no means unique ... the Competent Authority and others have found similar tendencies in other comparable businesses.*”

This focus on occupational safety may reflect that in the past organisations within the petroleum and allied industries may have concentrated efforts on behavioural modification. This may have been at the expense of involving workers in other critical aspects of safety management, such as process safety.

ISSUES CONCERNING WFI

Many organisations are aware of the benefits of WFI, however, research by ECOTEC Ltd⁷ and anecdotal evidence suggests that attempts to improve WFI are not always effective.

This may be because increasing involvement may not be straightforward and there are barriers preventing successful engagement of workers. Interviews with stakeholders, as part of our work to develop the guidance, helped to identify, possible reasons why WFI may not always be successful, for example:

- **Lack of senior manager commitment** – senior managers do not demonstrate commitment to WFI, sending the message to workers that their views are not valued;
- **Poor problem diagnoses** – underlying causes to problems are not identified and the wrong solutions and methods to improve WFI are applied;
- **Poor planning** – involvement programmes are not planned properly and hence people become unclear about roles and responsibilities;
- **Poor resourcing** – individuals involved in the involvement programme do not have time to become actively involved;
- **Lack of feedback** – the effect and results of involvement programmes are not communicated so individuals are unaware of the benefits and how they can help improve safety;
- **Initiatives are not sustained** – initiatives come to an end and are not continued so long lasting benefits are lost.

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP THE GUIDANCE

The work to develop the guidance was directed by the EI Human and Organisational Factors Working Group (HOFWG) using funding from EI Technical Partners. This group represented a range of stakeholders, for example:

- Regulators;
- Onshore oil and gas industry;
- Offshore oil and gas industry;
- Psychologists;
- Ergonomists;
- Designers.

The project comprised a number of tasks to develop the guidance:

- Consideration of research and existing guidance to determine the issues concerning workforce involvement and identify good practice;

- Conducting interviews, with a range of professionals from different petroleum and allied industries, to establish user requirements;
- Conducting interviews with others who have expertise in workforce involvement;
- Developing a specification document that details guidance structure and content;
- Engaging with stakeholders to review and comment on this framework document;
- Finalising the guidance in a form that best meets the industry's needs.

THE SCOPE OF THE GUIDANCE

The design of the guidance was initially based on information provided by EI's HOFWG, who stated that the guidance should:

- Identify the pertinent legislative requirements for both managers and workforces;
- Describe a step-by-step process illustrated with issues, case studies, and hints and tips;
- Identify and develop tools and resources for managers and workforces to help stimulate or structure workforce involvement.

Feedback from stakeholders and interviews also recommended that the guidance should explain why it was important to be fully committed when trying to increase WFI. This was because although potentially very beneficial trying to tackle WFI, without a clearly thought out and planned approach, could actually make things worse rather than better.

The rationale for the guidance was therefore similar to other existing environmental, safety and quality management models. A strong emphasis being placed on planning and taking a step-by-step structured approach with practical tools provided to help application. In addition because of the perceived complexity of WFI advice was also provided on the issues that can impact on the success of WFI.

GUIDANCE OUTLINE

The guidance provides an introduction which aims to explain and define WFI. This is because it is important to have a clear understanding of the concept before trying to improve WFI.

Understanding WFI is made more difficult, than might first appear, because there are many different terms that can be used to describe it. For example: worker involvement; workforce involvement; worker consultation; worker participation; worker engagement; partnership working and participative ergonomics.

Generally, however, participation, engagement and involvement appear synonymous and therefore for the purposes of this report are viewed as serving the same purpose. They are, however distinct from consultation. This distinction is explained by the HSE workforce involvement model.

This model shows, that at its most basic level, communication between management and workers is simply about keeping workers informed so they can do their jobs.

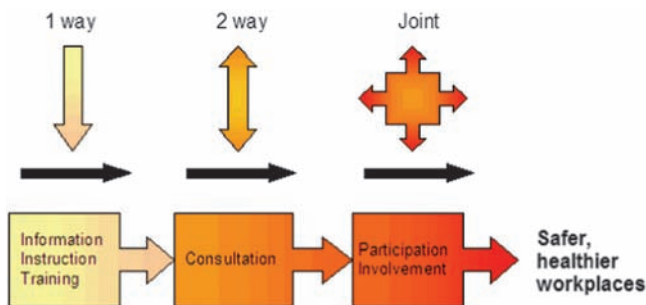


Figure 1 HSE workforce involvement model

The next more developed level, and what is required as a minimum in UK Health and Safety (H&S) legislation, is about consulting workers to find out their views and opinions. Decisions at this level are made by managers based on their understanding of an issue and their interpretation of feedback from a well designed consultation process.

The last level, shown in Figure 1, represents the active involvement of workers in the decision making process. This means managers and workers seek agreement together on health and safety and how, as partners, they will achieve commonly shared objectives. The final decision, and responsibility for health and safety, still ultimately resides with management.

This guidance focuses on improving this last level, providing help and advice on how to involve workers more effectively in health and safety.

To acknowledge the extensive role of contractors in the petroleum and allied industry WFI has been defined, in the guidance, by GSB as:

“The ways in which employees, including contractors, are encouraged to take part in making decisions about managing health and safety at work”.

GUIDANCE STYLE

This guidance is designed for everyone who wants to find out more about Workforce Involvement (WFI) and how it can be improved and made more effective. It is aimed at employers, managers, safety representatives, trade union officials, contractors and all workers within the petroleum and allied industries. This is because WFI is viewed as collaboration and not managers imposing WFI initiatives on workers. **Encouraging** workers to read the guidance will also mean they are more likely to understand and buy-in to the benefits of WFI.

To make it more accessible, simple language has been used and the size of the guidance has been limited to thirty pages. Images, like the cartoons below, are also used to break up the text (Figure 2).

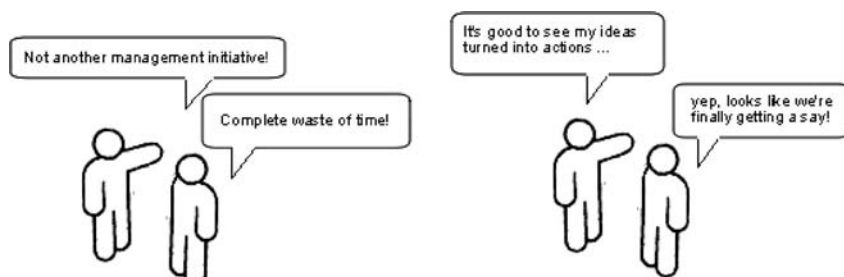


Figure 2. Cartoons to illustrate attitudes to WFI

The guidance also uses case studies to demonstrate the practical ways that different organisations have involved workers in different aspects of health and safety management. Case studies are also used to illustrate how to overcome the potential barriers to WFI. Genuine quotes, taken from industry, are also used to help convey key messages, for example:

“Once you have involved employees, you have to take on board what they are saying and use their ideas – you can not partially involve them. Employees have to see that their involvement has influenced its outcome. If an idea is wrong, fine, but go back and explain to that person why it is not a good idea”⁸

GUIDANCE STRUCTURE

This guidance provides a simple three step approach to ensure that efforts to improve WFI are more likely to succeed.

1. Assess current levels of WFI and identify the enablers and barriers to involvement;
2. Consider examples of activities to help improve WFI and then implement these in the workplace;
3. Ensure that workforce involvement is sustained and continues to lead to business improvements.

Using a methodical and thorough approach, that follows each of these key stages, is more likely to ensure WFI is effective. Being committed and taking the time and trouble of getting it right is more likely to lead to successful outcomes in the long run.

These 3 key stages and the elements that make up these stages are also presented in Figure 3 below and then discussed in more depth.

WHERE ARE WE NOW

Prior to trying to improve WFI it is important to determine the current level and quality of WFI. It is also important to identify what could be preventing WFI from being

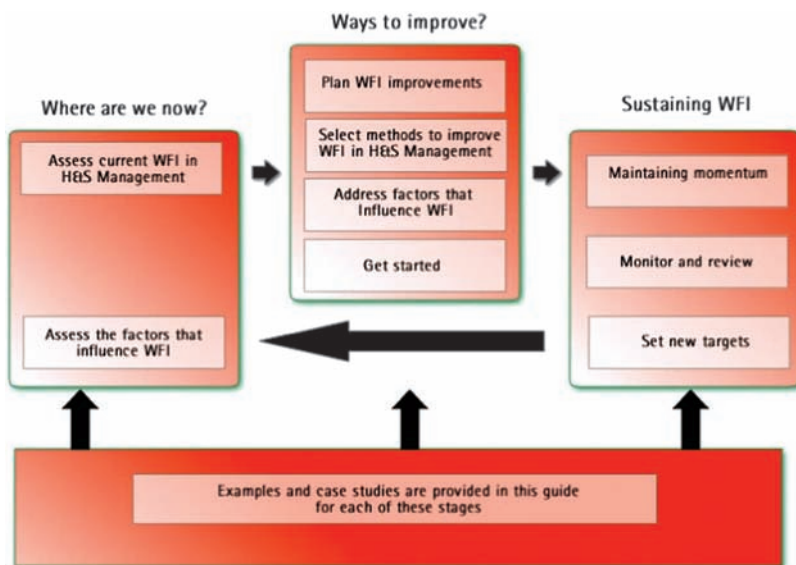


Figure 3. Three step approach for improving workforce involvement

effective. The guidance therefore provides advice and a series of questions to help the reader assess:

1. The current level of WFI in managing health and safety;
2. The factors that can influence the success and effectiveness of WFI.

The assessments are not aimed at providing a thorough, detailed analysis of current workforce involvement. They are designed to help generate discussion between workers and managers about where WFI might be improved. Information is provided in the guidance to help answer these questions. It also provides advice on how to complete, rate and review the findings from the assessment. Examples of the assessment questions are provided next:

WAYS TO IMPROVE

The purpose of this section is to help workers and managers plan and implement improvements to WFI. It does this by providing a series of case studies that illustrate how organisations, in the past, have involved workers in different aspects of health and safety management. For example how to involve workers in process safety:

Example 1: Process Hazard Analysis (PHA)

In order to enhance process safety within a facility an organisation decided to carry out Process Hazard Analysis (PHA) involving workers across the plant.

A team was selected comprising those with experience of operations and/or PHA. The manager of the area under review produced a charter that detailed objectives, scope, roles and responsibilities and formal communications for the PHA.

The PHA team (operators, engineer, trainer, technical safety specialist) identified potential hazards and issues. These were then discussed within the PHA meeting.

Recommendations were made to help combat the facility's significant areas of risk, for example recommending the sprinkler system for fire protection was put on a routine check.

When this check was conducted, two burst water pipes were found and fixed.

All recommendations were formally communicated through team briefings and fully supported by management.

This section also provides case studies detailing the different ways organisations have overcome the barriers to WFI, for example, poor levels of trust between managers and workers:

Example 2: Developing Trust

Specially arranged onshore meetings were used to develop trust between managers and workers based on an offshore platform.

The meetings, held at a hotel, helped to uncover some underlying problems because those involved reported they felt more freedom to express concerns.

There was also less distraction and less opposition from individuals who may not have taken WFI initiatives seriously in the past. The events also helped to demonstrate to workers that management were committed and took involvement seriously.

The guidance also suggests how to review the results from the assessment using a neutral forum like a workshop and provides advice on 'getting started', for example, how to set up an effective team to run a WFI initiative.

SUSTAINING WFI

Feedback from the interviews and HOFWG suggested that following initial improvements, impetus in increasing involvement can falter. This section of the guidance, therefore, provides advice on ways to **help sustain workforce involvement**:

- Maintaining momentum through the life-cycle of a programme;
- Reviewing and monitoring performance;
- Setting new targets once a programme is complete or coming to an end.

Practical advice is also provided on, for example, how feedback might be provided to workers:

- Staff meetings, committee meetings;
- Posters, newsletters, company magazines;
- Tool box talks and team briefing;
- Informal discussions;
- Forums and workshops.

CONCLUSION

The guidance, outlined in this paper, aims to provide simple WFI guidance, for the petroleum and allied industries, on how to achieve effective workforce involvement.

The need for such guidance is strongly made because:

- The guidance was commissioned by the Energy Institute – the leading professional body for the energy industries;
- The Health and Safety Executive has made a declaration of support for WFI;

Table 1. Assessing the current level of WFI in managing health and safety

Aspect of H&S	How much are workers involved in the different aspects of H&S Management	Not sure	Seldom if ever	Some times	Yes, often
Equipment	Have workers been involved in reviewing existing safety equipment (PPE, lifting equipment etc)? Have workers been involved in decisions to purchase new safety equipment (PPE, lifting equipment etc)?				
Workplace design	Have workers been involved in decisions to redesign the layout of the work environment when facilities are being rebuilt or refurbished?				
Task & procedure design	Have workers been involved in reviewing and/or developing safe working procedures? Have workers ever been involved in improving the safe design of tasks or ways of working?				
Process safety	Have workers been involved in analysing or reviewing process safety arrangements?				

- Research has recommended the need for “*a guide to worker engagement*”⁴;
- Reports investigating several major accidents in the high hazard industries have made recommendations to improve WFI.

The guidance states the necessity of understanding issues concerning WFI, carefully planning new initiatives and considering how they will be sustained into the future. The guidance helps to ensure that effective WFI is more likely to happen, by providing the appropriate rationale, strategy and tools.

Table 2. Assessing the factors that can influence the success and effectiveness of WFI

The questions are focused on health and safety but they can also be used to assess WFI in other areas of work.

Attitude

1. How do you rate the level of trust between the management and workers?				
Very poor ← Adequate → Very good				Do not know
1	2	3	4	5
Can you give a reason for your answer?				0
2. Do you think workers are suspicious about the motivations for workforce involvement?				
Suspicious ← Not sure → Not suspicious				Do not know
1	2	3	4	5
Can you give a reason for your answer?				0
3. Do you think workers want to be more involved in health and safety?				
No ← Not sure → Yes				Do not know
1	2	3	4	5
Can you give a reason for your answer?				0
4. Do you think things will change as a result of more workforce involvement?				
No ← Not sure → Yes				Do not know
1	2	3	4	5
Can you give a reason for your answer?				0

The importance of getting it right is that the failure of one WFI initiative can make it much more difficult to get employees involved again in the future. The guidance highlights the danger of imposing WFI initiatives on workers. It also explains how they can become cynical, about WFI schemes, if nothing every changes in their workplace.

Investigations of past incidents in the petroleum and allied industries, would seem to indicate, a focus on occupational safety. This may have been at the expense of not involving workers in other critical aspects of safety management, such as process safety.

The benefit of this guidance is that it aims to be different by encouraging a more holistic approach to tackling WFI, recognising that workers can be involved in many aspects of safety management. This may help organisations utilise workers more effectively, tapping into a very significant resource.

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Please note: Guidance on Effective Workforce Involvement in Health and Safety can be obtained from the Energy Institute: 61 New Cavendish Street London W1G 7AR (Telephone: 0207 467 7100) Website: <http://www.energyinst.org.uk/>.