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# Risks and hazards – review your level of control

Safety in truss plants is an endlessly complex and continually evolving task. In an earlier edition of the GN Guidelines (no. 56) Cameron Wake considered safety as a “moving target”. This is something that we all need to be reminded of from time to time.

Such a reminder came recently when I was visiting a truss plant where a close call had occurred. An employee was knocked over by a moving truss on a machine, luckily without serious injury. Safety was high on the agenda in this particular truss plant, and significant effort had been made to make the equipment as safe as possible. However, all this effort had not made them immune to the risks and hazards of truss plant machinery.

Management had done all the right things. They had previously performed their own risk and hazard analysis on their machinery and implemented control measures for each identified hazard. And yet it was still a close call for this employee. So the question management asked themselves was: what went wrong? The answer: they are chasing that moving target. In more practical terms they have to take step four of the risk management process, perhaps the most important step, and review the safety system they have in place on this machine.

For those of you who don't know about the risk management process, it is explained well on the Australian government website at [safeworkaustralia.gov.au/risk](http://safeworkaustralia.gov.au/risk). The basis of the process of managing workplace health and safety involves four steps:

- Identifying hazards – find out what could cause harm.
- Assessing risks (if necessary) – understand the nature of the

harm that could be caused by the hazard, how serious the harm could be and the likelihood of it happening.

- Controlling risks – implement the most effective control measure that is reasonably practicable in the circumstances.
- Reviewing control measures – ensure control measures are working as planned.

There is a lot more to be said about this process but I want to focus on the last step. I believe that reviewing control measures is the most important step because this is the only way to work out if the controls you have put in place up to this point are effective. If your controls don't work then there was no point in implementing them in the first place.

For our example truss plant it took a close call to identify that their current controls were not doing their job and that a change was required. However, it is not the ideal way to trigger a review process. What if the

person had been seriously injured? Nobody wants to see that happen. The chart shown below of the risk management process shows the entire safety processes in encircled by a ring titled “consultation”. Hazards, and the effectiveness of current safety controls, are best identified when done in consultation with your staff. Operators are the ones who are exposed to the risks and are the most likely to see situations that may be hazardous.

So what does this consultation look like? The ultimate solution is to create a culture where an employee feels free to raise any safety concerns with management as soon as they are noticed. Unfortunately, culture can be difficult to change. One method which may help to create an open culture is for management to schedule regular conversations with their workforce to allow an opportunity for hazards to be identified and discussed. Once the conversation is started, it becomes much easier for everyone involved to speak up. It is also important to ensure all staff know who the health and safety representative is on your site and regular conversations help to cement that knowledge within the work force.

So let's get chasing that safety target! I encourage you to investigate the risk management process, understand it and then to start a conversation with your workforce so you can create a safer place to work together. **T**



Left: work health and safety management system.

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