



CHRIS JONES RISK MANAGEMENT

Toolbox meetings – A valuable safety tool

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Toolbox meetings got their name from the way maintenance or construction employees would sit on their toolboxes while discussing the job they were working on with their supervisor.

Elements of a Toolbox Meeting

The name itself encapsulates the prime elements of a toolbox meeting:

- The meeting is attended by all the employees in the workgroup or team;
- The meeting is conducted by first line supervision;
- The meeting is usually “on-the-job” or in the workplace;
- The meeting is generally focused on the issues under the control of the workgroup, or which directly affect them. These will include production issues, quality, discipline concerns, and of course occupational health and safety; and
- The meetings are of a short duration, but conducted frequently and when required.



Toolbox meetings are very common in the construction industry. Builders and principal contractors frequently require their sub-contractors

to conduct toolbox meetings, often weekly. Some builders will hold a meeting of all the personnel on the site, but the former approach is more common. Accordingly, most windows companies are likely to be exposed to toolbox meetings through their installation work and sub-contractors, even if they are not conducting them for their manufacturing operations.

Nowadays, many manufacturing, warehousing and transport companies have incorporated toolbox meetings into their Occupational Health and Safety programmes, even if their employees and sub-contractors never go near a construction site.

Benefits

Why do so many companies hold regular toolbox meetings? There are a range of benefits:

- They provide a mechanism for communication and consultation on safety and production in which all employees participate;
- They are a great way to conduct training on safety or production topics of local concern;
- Conducting toolbox meetings enhance the authority and competency of leading hands, team leaders and supervisors; and
- Toolbox meetings give managers and supervisors a mechanism for developing their team, managing their section, and planning their work.

Documenting Meetings

Toolbox meetings are generally more informal than, for example, safety committee meetings, or production meetings; but that doesn't mean they shouldn't be documented. The topics discussed, hazards raised, and plans finalised are far too important to be left to the participant's memories. Most commonly, a simple, one page form is used that provides a place to record when the meeting was held, who attended, and what was discussed. Very small work groups can get away with recording the meetings in a diary or day-book. However, most principal contractors on site will want a copy of the record, and many will provide a form for this purpose. Larger employers usually file the toolbox meeting records after management has reviewed them.



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How Often?

To gain most benefit from toolbox meetings, supervisors should be provided with training in how to conduct and document the meetings. The frequency with which the meetings should be conducted should be specified. Typically, meetings will be held weekly, however even monthly meetings can be valuable, especially if more time is planned than for (say) weekly meetings.

Topics of Discussion

Supervisors should be provided with support material so that they can use the meeting to train employees in specific topics. In some organisations, a set of toolbox meeting topics are developed for the year, to support the annual training plan. It can be as simple as working through the specific headings in the induction training package. The use of training videos, the provision of posters, and the development of pre-packaged toolbox topics significantly enhances the effectiveness of the meetings. Support materials give supervisors the confidence they need to hold the meetings effectively.

Toolbox meetings are an excellent forum for conducting, reviewing, and consulting on risk assessments and safe work procedures (SWP). If the toolbox meetings in a section do nothing else but review the risk assessments and SWP for their section then they make an extremely valuable contribution to safety, productivity and training.

Consultation

Toolbox meetings can help meet the legislative requirements to provide an effective consultation process. However, they are really not a substitute for employee OHS representatives or safety committees, especially when these are requested by employees or are a legislative requirement. Toolbox meetings are best used as an additional consultation and training tool rather than replacing other, more formal, systems and procedures.

Many employees are unfamiliar with the activities of their safety committee and safety representatives. Toolbox meetings can enhance these formal

consultation activities. Some companies have their supervisors review the minutes of the last safety committee meeting at their toolbox meeting. This ensures that employees are familiar with any decisions of their committee, and provides an opportunity to plan how to apply the minutes of the meeting to their own section.

Toolbox meetings are far too useful to be confined to construction work.

Chris Jones Risk Management provides a wide range of Occupational Health and Safety services and training, including:

- ✓ OHS Audits – SafetyPlan; SafetyPlan Gold; AS 4801
- ✓ OHS programme implementation
- ✓ Risk Assessments
- ✓ OHS culture surveys
- ✓ Accredited training for construction induction and consultation (NSW)
- ✓ OHS training for management and supervisors

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