



H&S challenges in 2022

Health, safety and wellbeing issues should all be a significant focus in toolbox meetings during these difficult times.

AS WE ARE ALL aware, the last 12 months have been very challenging for the economy. The combination of mandates around different COVID-19 variants and the flow-on impacts across the construction workplace has been significant.

This has meant that health aspects have become as important as safety for construction entities' operations, if they weren't previously. It is important that this focus is a key part of licensed building practitioner toolbox meetings. Although this element has been part of the legislation for many years, it has often been sidelined by the focus on safety on site.

Asking for help is a sign of wisdom and strength

Even as the gender make-up of the sector changes, a very blokey culture remains evident in many areas. The idea still prevails for many that it is a sign of weakness to ask for help when struggling to mentally cope with circumstances that are outside our control.

Whether it's staff shortages, consent delays, isolations, cash flow issues, cost rises, product shortages or transit delays - there isn't a party in the sector who has not been impacted. The personal circumstances of many have resulted in one of the most challenging times in our history for wellbeing.

I believe it is not a sign of weakness to ask for help, whether it's to a colleague, friend or professional advisor. It's a sign of wisdom and strength.

Help is available – you
only have to put your
hand up and ask.

Giving your team and yourself permission to acknowledge that the current environment has impacted our sense of wellness and wellbeing needs to be front and centre at toolbox discussions.

Several organisations are doing great work in this area with the aim of supporting the construction sector to address these issues and show that it is OK to not be OK. In the toolbox space, we need a culture that

reminds us to look out for our mates as well as our families, at work and in the community.

Sources that can help with the conversation

Many of the sector's associations provide resources to their members that help in managing this critical element of our workplace.

WorkSafe (www.worksafe.govt.nz) has several documents available for download, to assist starting these conversations:

- *Starting the conversation about mental health.*
- *Mental health when working from home, for PCBUs.*
- *Improving work-related health and mentally healthy work.*
- *Resources for maintaining mentally healthy work during COVID-19.*

The industry has also been very proactive with the MATES in Construction programme, both here and in Australia. Taking responsibility for our industry's needs sends a strong signal that this really does matter. Again, there are some excellent resources

available that allow you to start a direct conversation, which to many is a challenging thing to do.

Many industry partners are also providing space for these key messages to be delivered to you and your team.

Taking these steps is not, for want of a better term, 'woke'. There have been case studies that show a focus on health and wellbeing from an employer or PCBU leads to lower injury rates and therefore less lost productivity as a result. For employees, knowing that their wellbeing matters to the business makes a difference to how they approach their roles and those in a leadership position.

The key message to be remembered is that it's not a sign of weakness to ask for help. It is in fact a sign of wisdom. Help is available - you only have to put your hand up and ask. ◀

Quiz

1. What present-day issues can have an impact on our mental wellbeing?
 - a. Staff shortages.
 - b. Isolations.
 - c. Cost rises
 - d. Product shortages and transit delays.
 - e. All the above.
2. Is it a sign of weakness to ask for help?
 - a. Never.
 - b. Sometimes.
 - c. Only in front of your workmates.
3. Where can you find resources to assist in starting these conversations?
 - a. Worksafe.
 - b. MATES in Construction.
 - c. Many industry partners.
 - d. All the above.

ANSWERS: 1. e, 2. a, 3. d.