

# More Than Balancing Safety And Efficiency



**James MacPherson, GGF Health, Safety and Environment Manager says safety should not clash with efficiency – in fact safety done properly can help with efficiency.**

**The GGF's James MacPherson writes on the subject of efficiency – getting things done with minimum expenditure of time and effort – and asks if this clashes with the principles of health & safety.**

Sometimes, the risk of a job will warrant a health and safety process or step or mitigation. That will slow the job down. And now we are facing Covid-19 in a second wave, there will be an even greater requirement to put in processes that slow things down and increase effort – and as we know, time is money.

## **So what's the solution here?**

There is no definitive and easy solution, yet companies need to build some capacity to absorb the change in their businesses and I believe this will change how those businesses conduct and perceive safety.

## **An incident in your business can't be efficient**

A lost employee, time off, potential court case, the cost of an accident, the list goes on. So safety has to be built in to the business

and used to enhance efficiency rather than hinder it. And we must make sure safety is not just papers, policies, and processes that give us a false sense of security.

## **Not efficient?**

A lot of the time when we think safety isn't efficient we perhaps mean, the bad implementation of safety procedures, a focus on our systems and assurance rather than actual safety. However, we need assurance in our businesses so we need to find a balance between, delivering safety and still providing assurance of compliance.

## **Things to focus on**

Work hard to design safety in time. Are you allocating time in the working day for people to be safe? Are you creating goal conflicts, for example designing a great safety process but then giving too many tasks in a day, so then safety takes the toll of the shortcuts? Have a look at your systems – are they actually delivering safety and do they make things safer? For example, creating checklists – are they too arduous and detailed which prevents them getting done in time? Or could you take information that is readily available in another part of the business and use it to inform your safety audits? In the factory setting, this might be taking forklift maintenance records and using them to show safety

checks have been carried out as part of the process rather than allocating safety checks as a completely separate process. At the installation side – Routine scaffold checks are vital, however, are you monitoring the completion of the checklist or the quality of the check?

## **Reflect reality**

So how do you know the scaffold or forklift has been checked? Go and check it yourself and if you are not satisfied, then react, find out why, and move into the formal recorded version eg near-miss reporting and investigation to learn why. These approaches will enable the workers' time to be focused on safety and not paperwork.

Finally, you need your systems to reflect reality. The best advice is, it's what you do, not just what you say you do. How to ensure systems reflect reality is all about building accountability and ownership. This and all of the points mentioned should be built on foundations of engagement and involvement with employees. You should do safety with your staff not do safety to them. Good safety is an inclusive social exercise. **i**

**James MacPherson - GGF Health, Safety and Environment Manager.**