



Top Compliance (Pty) Ltd

Occupational Health and Safety

Your business' safety is our concern

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✓ Auditing ✓ Consulting ✓ Training ✓ Retail

Cell number: 082 442 8521

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The role of communication in preventing workplace accidents

Accidents in factories, small businesses, and schools often happen not because safety rules don't exist, but because they were not clearly communicated or understood by those who needed them most. Communication is a vital part of health and safety management, it ensures that everyone knows the hazards, the rules, and the steps to take when emergencies arise. The Occupational Health and Safety Act, No. 85 of 1993 (OHSA) makes this a legal requirement through Section 8 (General Duties of Employers) and Section 13 (Duty to Inform Employees).

Legal duties of employers

Under Section 8, employers must provide and maintain a safe working environment, which includes giving clear instructions, information, and supervision. For example, in a factory, this means properly explaining machine operating procedures and having visible safety signage near each machine. In schools, it means teachers and staff must be aware of fire evacuation routes, tours, travel and playground safety hazards.

Section 13 specifically requires employers to inform every employee about the health and safety hazards of their job. This information must be communicated in a way that employees understand whether through verbal instructions, written notices, multilingual signage, or hands-on demonstrations. Simply putting up a safety poster is not enough.

Communication through training and record-keeping

The most effective communication tool for safety is training. Whether it's teaching employees how to safely handle chemicals, [training staff in first aid](#), or briefing staff on [emergency evacuation procedures](#), training ensures that safety messages are not only delivered but understood.

To meet OHSA requirements and protect both employees and the employer:

- Keep signed attendance registers for all training sessions.
- Update training whenever processes, or equipment change.
- Use simple, practical demonstrations to ensure understanding.
- Conduct regular refresher sessions and short toolbox talks.

Maintaining evidence of training is critical. If an incident occurs, these records show that the employer has taken reasonable steps to inform and protect employees, reducing both injury risk and legal liability.

Examples of accidents caused by unclear communication are sadly common:

- An employee in a small factory suffered chemical burns when a cleaning agent was changed but staff were never informed of its stronger concentration. A simple safety briefing and updated labelling could have prevented the injury.
- At a school, a child was injured when a loose gate fell. Staff had previously noticed the hazard but did not communicate it to maintenance or management. The lack of a formal hazard reporting system delayed repairs and led to the accident.

How companies can improve safety communication

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and schools often operate without a dedicated safety department, making effective communication a critical element in preventing accidents. One of the simplest and most impactful methods is conducting weekly safety briefings or toolbox talks. These short 5 – 15 minute sessions, held at the start of each shift, provide an opportunity to discuss immediate hazards, planned maintenance, or changes in procedures. Employees should be encouraged to speak up about risks they have observed, and each session should be documented with a signed attendance register as evidence and to ensure accountability. Alternatively, it can be included in the general meeting agenda, with minutes recorded and retained as evidence.

Another essential component is clear and visible [safety signage](#). All warning signs should be multilingual and include pictograms where possible, ensuring that every employee, regardless of language proficiency, understands the hazard. Signs must be placed in high-risk areas such as near machinery, chemical storage rooms, or emergency exits, regularly checked for visibility and wear, and supported by floor markings or colour-coded safety zones.

To further strengthen safety communication, SMEs should establish accessible hazard reporting systems. This could be as simple as a physical logbook, a safety suggestion box, or a WhatsApp group that allows instant reporting of unsafe conditions. A designated staff member should review reports daily and display corrective actions on a hazard board to promote transparency and reassure staff that concerns are addressed promptly.

Having a structured emergency communication plan is also crucial. This plan should outline how to respond to fires, chemical spills, injuries, or security threats, and should be distributed to all staff members. Loudhailers, intercom systems, or alarm bells should be used to alert everyone during emergencies, and specific roles such as fire fighters, evacuation marshals and first aiders must be clearly communicated. Annual evacuation drills should be conducted with attendance recorded for compliance.

Training plays a significant role in reinforcing safety messages. New employees should receive comprehensive induction training covering workplace hazards, safe procedures, and emergency responses. Refresher training should be provided every year or whenever there are changes in equipment or processes. Practical demonstrations, interactive sessions, and post-training evaluations help confirm understanding, and all training must be properly documented in an organized, retrievable file.

Promoting a culture of open communication is equally important. Employees should feel comfortable reporting hazards or unsafe practices without fear of blame. Recognizing and rewarding proactive safety behaviour encourages participation, while management meetings and noticeboards can be used to keep safety communication active and visible.

SMEs and schools can leverage technology to enhance safety communication. Tools such as SMS alerts, or electronic message boards allow for quick dissemination of safety instructions and updates.

By implementing these measures, SMEs and schools establish strong, multi-channel communication systems that ensure safety information is consistently delivered, understood, and acted upon. This proactive approach not only fulfils the legal requirements of Sections 8 and 13 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act but also fosters a culture where hazards are promptly identified, openly discussed, and effectively controlled keeping every employee, contractor, client, teacher, learner, visitor safe.

Clear communication creates a shared responsibility for safety. When employees understand hazards and procedures, they are empowered to prevent accidents, protect themselves, and assist others in emergencies.

Implementing the communication requirements of Sections 8 and 13 of OHSA is not just about compliance it's about preventing avoidable injuries and tragedies. Small steps such as regular safety talks, transparent reporting channels, and documented training go a long way in creating a safe, well-informed environment for everyone.

An unspoken hazard is a danger waiting to happen. Speak up, train regularly, document every session, and ensure that every person understands how to stay safe.

Should you require further assistance or advice feel free to email us on info@topcompliance.co.za

Yours in Health and Safety

				
Occupational health and safety auditing and consulting		Online safety shop		
				
Appointments, checklists and templates	First aid equipment	Signage	Legal posters	Safety Equipment

Courses offered by Top Compliance (Pty) Ltd

ONLINE ACADEMY - https://academy.topcompliance.co.za/		
Occupational Health and Safety Courses	Online	Onsite Excluding travel
Safety representative – Legal Liability	R980.00	R1300.00
The Occupational Health and Safety Act & responsibilities of management – Legal Liability	R1250.00	R 1730.00
Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	R735.00	R875.00
Food facility health & safety course in terms of R638	R735.00	R875.00
Basic Ladder Safety Course	R735.00	R810.00
Fire Fighting and Prevention Courses		
Fire Marshal - Basic firefighting	R735.00	R875.00
Fire & Evacuation marshal - Basic firefighting with emergency action planning	R810.00	R950.00

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ONSITE TRAINING	
First Aid Courses:	
Level 1 - US 119567 - Perform basic life support and first aid procedures	2 days
Level 2 - US 120496 - Provide risk-based primary emergency care/first aid in the workplace	3 days
Level 3 - US 376480 - Provide first aid as an advanced first responder	3 days
Level 1 & 2 - US 119567 & 120496	3 days
Level 1, 2 & 3 - US 119567, 120496 & 376480	5 days
Level 2 & 3 - US 120496 & 376480	3 days
Child and infant CPR & choking	6 hours
Adult CPR & choking	6 hours
Adult CPR & choking and AED	1 day
Occupational Health and Safety Courses	
Safety representative – Legal Liability	1 day
The Occupational Health and Safety Act & responsibilities of management – Legal Liability	1 day
Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	1 day
Food facility health & safety course in terms of R638	6 hours
Basic Ladder Safety	6 hours
Fire Fighting and Prevention Courses	
Fire Marshal - Basic firefighting	6 hours
Fire & Evacuation marshal - Basic firefighting with emergency action planning	1 day