



Top Compliance (Pty) Ltd

Occupational Health and Safety

Your business' safety is our concern

Our Services

✓ Auditing ✓ Consulting ✓ Training ✓ Retail

Cell number: 082 442 8521

www.topcompliance.co.za

QSE B-BBEE - Level Four

REGULATIONS
RULES - LAW
REQUIREMENTS
COMPLIANCE
STANDARDS
TRANSPARENCY
POLICIES

January 2026 NEWSLETTER

Contact details:

Pat: 082 442 8521 (08h00 – 16h30)

Email: p.wessels@topcompliance.co.za

Website: <https://www.topcompliance.co.za>

The impact of human behaviour in workplace safety

Workplace safety is often discussed in terms of policies, procedures, equipment, and compliance documentation. While these elements are essential and form the backbone of any occupational health and safety management system, incidents and near misses seldom occur because a policy was missing or a procedure was poorly written. Most incidents occur because of human behaviour and how people perceive risk, respond to pressure, follow rules, interpret instructions, and make decisions in real working conditions. The [Occupational Health and Safety Act, No. 85 of 1993](#) (OHS Act) recognises this reality by placing strong emphasis not only on systems and structures, but also on behaviour, supervision, training, consultation, and accountability.

In terms of Section 8 of the Act, employers are required to “provide and maintain, as far as is reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risk to the health of employees.” This obligation extends far beyond physical conditions such as machinery, buildings, or personal protective equipment. It includes how work is planned, how tasks are executed, how people interact with hazards, and how behavioural risks are managed. Human behaviour is therefore not separate from legal compliance; it is central to it. Even the most comprehensive and well-designed safety system will fail if unsafe behaviour becomes accepted practice or if deviations from safe procedures are tolerated.

Human behaviour in the workplace is shaped by experience, habits, workplace culture, peer influence, and perceived expectations from management. Over time, repeated exposure to hazards without incident often leads to a reduction in perceived risk. Employees may begin to believe that because “nothing has gone wrong before,” the risk is either minimal or controllable. This gradual behavioural shift contributes directly to complacency and risk-taking, and it undermines the employer’s duty under Section 8(2)(d), which requires the identification of hazards and the evaluation of risks associated with those hazards on an ongoing basis. Hazard identification is ineffective if behavioural changes are not continuously monitored and addressed.

Workplace pressure is a powerful and often underestimated driver of unsafe behaviour. Production targets, academic deadlines, staff shortages, financial constraints, and operational demands can unintentionally encourage shortcuts and rule breaking. When employees perceive that productivity or output is prioritised over safety, behaviour adjusts accordingly. The Act addresses this through Section 8(2)(a), which obliges employers to establish and maintain safe systems of work. A system of work cannot be regarded as safe if it implicitly relies on employees bypassing controls, ignoring procedures, or accepting risk to meet operational expectations.

Risk perception varies significantly between individuals. Younger or less experienced workers may underestimate risk due to lack of exposure, while long serving or experienced workers may underestimate risk because unsafe practices have become normalised over time. This is precisely why Section 8(2)(e) places a clear duty on employers to provide

appropriate information, instruction, training, and supervision. Effective training must address not only what employees must do, but why controls exist, what the consequences of unsafe behaviour are, and how individual actions impact the safety of others. Supervision must then consistently reinforce these expectations in the workplace.

Employees themselves also carry legal responsibilities in relation to their behaviour. In terms of Section 14(a) of the Act, every employee must take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions. However, employees can only reasonably fulfil this duty when employers create an environment that supports safe behaviour, addresses unsafe acts constructively, and treats hazard and incident reporting seriously. A punitive or dismissive approach to reporting often results in under-reporting and hidden risk.

Leadership behaviour has a direct, visible, and measurable impact on workplace safety culture. When managers and supervisors ignore unsafe acts, even occasionally, they send a powerful message that rules are optional or negotiable. This behaviour undermines compliance and erodes trust in the safety system. Section 16 of the Act places responsibility on the Chief Executive Officer to ensure that the duties of the employer are properly discharged. While certain functions may be delegated, accountability for safety leadership and the tone set at the top cannot be delegated away.

Supervision remains one of the most critical control measures for managing human behaviour. Effective supervision reinforces standards, corrects unsafe behaviour early, and supports employees in applying training in real working conditions. Inadequate, inconsistent, or absent supervision is frequently identified during incident investigations as a contributing factor to unsafe behaviour. This links directly back to Section 8(2)(e), which clearly establishes supervision as a legal requirement rather than a discretionary management activity.

Fatigue, stress, and mental overload are significant behavioural risk factors that substantially increase the likelihood of human error. Long working hours, insufficient rest periods, high cognitive demands, and emotional stress impair judgement, concentration, and reaction time. Although the Act does not explicitly refer to fatigue by name, the general duty under Section 8 requires employers to consider all factors that may affect employee health and safety, including those that influence human performance and decision-making.

A blame-focused approach to unsafe behaviour discourages reporting and conceals risk. The Act actively promotes consultation and participation, recognising that employees are closest to the work and are often the first to observe unsafe practices and emerging behavioural risks. Sections 17 and 18, which provide for the appointment of Health and Safety Representatives and the establishment of Health and Safety Committees, are fundamental to addressing behavioural safety. These structures create formal mechanisms for identifying unsafe behaviour, discussing root causes, and recommending corrective measures before incidents occur.

[Health and Safety Representatives](#) play a critical role in observing day-to-day behaviour, identifying unsafe acts, and engaging with employees at operational level. [Health and Safety Committees](#) provide a platform where behavioural trends, near misses, training needs, and systemic pressures can be openly discussed between management and employees. However, these structures are only effective if representatives and committee members are properly trained. Training equips them to understand legal duties, recognise behavioural risks, interpret incident patterns, and contribute meaningfully to corrective actions and cultural improvement. Without adequate training, these statutory roles risk becoming procedural formalities rather than active drivers of safety culture.

Failure to address unsafe behaviour can result in serious legal and operational consequences. Where employers do not take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable unsafe acts, enforcement action may follow. Section 38 of the Act provides for penalties where there is a failure to comply with the provisions of the Act, particularly where negligence, lack of supervision, or disregard for safety duties can be demonstrated. Investigations frequently reveal that incidents occurred not because of missing rules, but because unsafe behaviour was known, tolerated, or inadequately managed.

Improving workplace safety therefore requires a deliberate shift from rule-based compliance alone to behaviour-focused risk management. Policies and procedures must be reinforced through leadership example, competent supervision, meaningful training, active safety representatives, functional safety committees, and a culture that supports safe decision-making even under pressure. Behavioural safety is not about control or punishment; it is about understanding why people behave the way they do and designing systems that consistently support safe behaviour.

Workplace safety is shaped by what people do when no one is watching. The Occupational Health and Safety Act provides the legal framework, but it is human behaviour that determines outcomes. Organisations that recognise this move beyond reactive compliance and build resilient safety cultures where legal duties are fulfilled through everyday actions, informed participation, and trained safety leadership at all levels – not merely through documented intentions.

“Health and Safety Representatives and Committees are not administrative requirements; they are the behavioural early-warning system of an effective safety culture.”

For more information, please contact 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	R875.00
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
First aid		
Level 1 - US 119567 - Perform basic life support and first aid procedures – THEORY MODULE	R400.00	-

ONLINE ACADEMY - https://academy.topcompliance.co.za/	
Occupational Health and Safety Courses	
Safety representative – Legal Liability	
The Occupational Health and Safety Act & responsibilities of management – Legal Liability	
Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	
Food facility health & safety course in terms of R638	
Basic Ladder Safety Course	
Fire Fighting and Prevention Courses	
Fire Marshal - Basic firefighting	
Fire & Evacuation marshal - Basic firefighting with emergency action planning	

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