

مركز أبوظبي للصحة المهنية  
ABU DHABI OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH CENTER

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# Abu Dhabi Occupational Safety and Health System Framework

**(OSHAD-SF)**

**OSHAD-SF Technical Guideline**

**Communication and Consultation**

**Version 3.0**

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ABU DHABI PUBLIC  
HEALTH CENTRE

مركز أبوظبي  
للصحة العامة



## Important Note:

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## 1. Introduction

- (a) This technical guideline provides additional information to assist entities comply with the requirements of *OSHAD-SF - Element 4 – Communication and Consultation*. The contents of this technical guide are not mandatory; however adopting the information within this guide will assist you in compliance to the requirement of the Element.
- (b) Robust communication and consultation procedures are essential to ensure compliance to the *OSHAD-SF* and also to develop partnerships between all relevant stakeholders, including staff, contractors and the community.
- (c) Robust consultation procedures will also help achieve better OSH outcomes through the risk management process. Refer to *OSHAD-SF - Element 2 – Risk Management* and *OSHAD-SF - TG – Risk Management* for further information.

## 2. Definitions

- (a) Communication has been defined within the *OSHAD-SF* as any act by which one person gives to or receives from a person information about that person's needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states. Communication may be intentional or unintentional, may involve conventional or unconventional signals, may take linguistic or non-linguistic forms, and may occur through spoken or other modes.
- (b) One of the main objectives of communication, in relation to OSH, is to ensure that all persons who are affected by your undertakings are aware of the correct information and have a common understanding of the correct requirements.
- (c) It is important to ensure that communication of information is not mistaken for training as in general when delivering communication on OSH issues, no test of understanding is undertaken. For further information on training and competency, refer to *OSHAD-SF-Element 4 – Training, Awareness and Competency* and *OSHAD-SF - TG – Training, Awareness and Competency*.
- (d) Consultation has been defined within the *OSHAD-SF* as seeking and giving of advice, information, and / or opinion, usually involving a consideration of different party's views or concerns.

### 3. Benefits of Communication and Consultation

- (a) Entities will see many benefits to communicating and consulting with their staff, contractors and other relevant stakeholders, however listed below are some of the more common benefits seen when implementing robust procedures, including
- (i) improved staff commitment and job satisfaction, particularly if staff understand what the entity is trying to achieve and the effect of their contribution;
  - (ii) increased morale leading to lower turnover of staff and reduced recruitment and training costs;
  - (iii) better staff performance, if they understand targets and deadlines and receive proper feedback;
  - (iv) provision of accurate information or guidance, which helps avoid misunderstandings, e.g. on OSH policies, business performance, staff changes and job structures;
  - (v) reduced risk profile by involving staff in the risk management process and understanding their needs and concerns;
  - (vi) improved management decision making, due in part to feedback from staff;
  - (vii) improved management/staff relations;
  - (viii) improved exchange of ideas; and
  - (ix) consistent approach and strategy across the business.

## 4. Communication Program

- (a) *OSHAD-SF - Element 4 – Communication and Consultation* Section 3(a) requires all entities to develop and implement a robust communication program.
- (b) The program that is developed should ensure appropriate communication of OSH information to the entity's staff and contractors ensures that everybody is made aware of the requirements of the OSH Management system and they understand the importance of following the system.
- (c) Further Section 3.1(a) of *OSHAD-SF - Element 4 – Consultation and Communication* sets out the minimum requirements of the communication program. These include:
  - (i) internal communication throughout the various levels of the entity;
  - (ii) communication with contractors and other visitors to the workplace;
  - (iii) relevant communication with external stakeholders; and
  - (iv) development of an annual OSH performance report, to be used for internal communication and management review purposes, external stakeholder communication / distribution is optional.

### 4.1 Developing a Communication Program

- (a) One of the most important elements of a good communication program is understanding what information you must communicate, what information staff would like to have communicated and importantly how this information is communicated.
- (b) When considering the development of your communication program, a good starting point is to fully understand who you need to communicate with. As a minimum, entities should be communicating with the following parties:
  - (i) staff;
  - (ii) visitors;
  - (iii) contractors; and
  - (iv) the local community.
- (c) The entities risk management program should assist in defining any other parties that may need to be included in the communication program.
- (d) Once the entity has defined who they need to communicate with, it is good practice to then consult with each party or set up a consultation group that includes representation from each group to look at what information needs to be communicated and how.
- (e) When consulting with staff, it is important to ensure that a cross section of staff are involved in the process to get good reliable information on what information they would like to have communicated and how.

## 4.2 Information to be communicated

- (a) When determining what information needs to be communicated, entities need to consider two different elements:
- (i) mandatory information – information that, through legal requirements, must be communicated; and
  - (ii) other information – information the entity or staff would like to have communicated on a regular basis.
- (b) When developing a list of information entities would like to communicate, the following topics should be considered (this is not an exhaustive list and entities should define the topics to communicate through consultation with their staff). It should be noted that some of these topics may have a legal requirement to communicate the information to their staff or other interested parties:
- (i) OSH Policy statement;
  - (ii) OSH objectives and targets;
  - (iii) values, mission and vision;
  - (iv) OSH management system requirements;
  - (v) OSH roles and responsibilities;
  - (vi) general OSH issues;
  - (vii) OSH system performance;
  - (viii) modification or change in systems;
  - (ix) non-conformances;
  - (x) legal updates;
  - (xi) staff suggestions or concerns;
  - (xii) social associations; and
  - (xiii) customer complaints.

### 4.2.1 Mandatory Communication

- (a) There are numerous legal requirements in place that require entities to communicate information to their staff, visitors or contractors. This includes:
- (i) *OSHAD-SF - Element 1 – Roles, Responsibilities and Self-Regulation, Section 3.1* requires employers to communicate the OSH roles and responsibilities of their workforce; and
  - (ii) Article 92 of Federal Law no 8. For 1980 – On regulation of Labour Relations *which states that each employer shall post detailed information on measures to be taken against fire and any other hazards in the workplace.*
- (b) The entity should undertake a review of their legal register and from this should be able to define what information must be communicated to their staff. Refer to *OSHAD-SF - Element 9 – Compliance and Management Review* for further information.

### 4.3 Methods of Communication

- (a) One of the most important issues when communicating to staff is to ensure that suitable methods of communication are used. Often entities will spend a lot of time developing communication strategies and then fail to understand the best methods of delivering the information.
- (b) Numerous methods are available for communicating to staff and other parties which include:
  - (i) posters / notice boards / printed material;
  - (ii) entity intranet;
  - (iii) entity shared computer drive(s) / SharePoint;
  - (iv) DVD / Cd Rom;
  - (v) one-to-one discussions;
  - (vi) Meetings / Conferences;
  - (vii) Emails / Fax / Phone; and
  - (viii) entity newsletters.
- (c) Each method has its own benefits, however entities should consider the information that is to be communicated and also the target audience. This will then assist in choosing the correct method to communicate the information.

#### 4.3.1 Barriers to Effective Communication

- (a) When choosing the method, the entity should also consider the following issues
  - (i) access to information – if using electronic means to deliver a message, the entity must ensure that all of the target audience has easy everyday access to the source. Often people at remote locations will have difficulty in accessing this;
  - (ii) language – The entity should ensure that they fully understand the language requirements of the target audience and ensure that the message is delivered in the mother tongue where possible;
  - (iii) reading / writing ability – the entity should consider the ability of their staff when considering how to communicate a message;
  - (iv) complexity of the information – if the entity is delivering a very complex message, then they should consider doing this through a more structured method, giving staff the opportunity to ask questions. The same should be considered when delivering a message that is considered high importance or linked to vital changes; and
  - (v) Overload of information – continual use of one method of communication will lead to some staff not fully understanding the message, especially where workloads are high.



## 5. Consultation Program

- (a) *OSHAD-SF – Element 4 – Communication and Consultation* Section 3(a) requires all entities to develop robust procedures to ensure staff are consulted with on all relevant matters related to OSH.
- (b) The purpose of ensuring consultation is to foster cooperation and develop partnerships between employers, staff, contractors and other relevant stakeholders to ensure protection of safety and health.
- (c) Further Section 3.2 of *OSHAD-SF – Element 4 – Communication and Consultation* sets out specific requirements for the program, including:
  - (i) The entity's Consultation Program shall address, at a minimum:
    1. ensure effective consultation and participation of staff in OSH matters;
    2. appropriate involvement in risk management activities;
    3. appropriate involvement in OSH incident investigation;
    4. involvement in the development and review of OSH policies and objectives;
    5. structure of consultation committees and meetings; and
    6. consultation with contractors and other external stakeholders.
  - (ii) Consultation shall take place at every stage of the risk management process including when:
    1. new work processes, equipment or tools are being designed, purchased or modified (consult early to allow changes to be incorporated);
    2. identifying hazardous activities which require assessment;
    3. establishing priorities for the assessment of hazardous activities and during the risk assessment process;
    4. deciding on control measures to manage risk;
    5. reviewing the effectiveness of implemented control measures and identifying whether further hazards and risks are created by the chosen controls; and
    6. deciding the contents of OSH procedural documents.

### 5.1 Benefits of Consultation

- (a) Consultation is a two-way process, allowing staff to raise concerns and influence decisions on the management of safety and health. Your staff are often the best people to understand the risks in the workplace and involving them in making decisions shows them that you take their safety and health seriously.
- (b) Your staff influences OSH through their own actions. They are often the best people to understand the risks in their workplace. Talking, listening and co-operating with each other can help:
  - (i) identify joint solutions to problems;
  - (ii) develop a positive safety and health culture where risks are managed sensibly;

- (iii) reduce incidents and ill health, plus their related costs to your business;
  - (iv) bring about improvements in overall efficiency, quality and productivity;
  - (v) meet customer demands and maintain credibility; and
  - (vi) comply with legal requirements.
- (c) A workforce that feels valued and involved in decision-making plays a big part in a high-performing workplace. Empowering your workforce, giving them the right skills, and getting them involved in making decisions shows them that you take their safety, health and wellbeing seriously. They not only raise concerns but offer solutions too. There can be an impact far beyond safety and health management if the workforce is not engaged on OSH issues which affect them.

## 5.2 What do I need to Consult On?

- (a) Legislation states that you must consult your workforce about anything in the workplace that could substantially affect their safety and health. The specifics will vary from workplace to workplace. In general, you must consult about:
- (i) any change which may have a substantial effect on your workforce's safety and health. Such changes may include new or different procedures, types of work, equipment, premises, and ways of working (e.g. new shift patterns);
  - (ii) your arrangements for getting competent people to help you meet your obligations under OSH legislation, for example the appointment of an OSH manager.
  - (iii) information you must give your workforce on the likely risks in their work and precautions they should take. Discuss with staff the best way for information to be shared. Consider issues of language, literacy and learning disabilities if appropriate.
  - (iv) the planning of safety and health training; and
  - (v) OSH consequences of introducing new technology.
- (b) Don't limit the scope of consultation to a pre-set list because there will be times when you should involve staff about issues which are not on the list.
- (c) Consult and involve staff on:
- (i) Incident investigation reports, risk assessments, and emergency plans; and
  - (ii) Occupational health issues including what the provision (for staff) is and how effective it is.
- (d) It is good practice to provide feedback to explain decisions and respond to issues raised by staff. The appropriate method of responding (in writing or verbally), and reasonable timescales for providing a response, will depend on the nature and circumstances of the issue and the workplace. The arrangements should be agreed with your staff in advance.
- (e) Staff involvement is a good way to address work-related health issues, particularly if you have usually involved people more on safety matters in the past. Health issues, like stress in the workplace or musculoskeletal disorders, are areas where your staff can add value in helping you to address them.

### 5.2.1 Risk Assessments

- (a) There is a legal duty to assess the risks to the safety and health of staff (and risks to the safety and health of people not in your employment) which they are exposed to while they are at work.
- (b) In carrying out a risk assessment, the entity should consult staff. It is a valuable way of involving the staff that do the work. They know the risks involved and scope for potentially dangerous short cuts and problems. Staff are more likely to understand why procedures are put in place to control risks and follow them if they have been involved in the process of developing safety and health practices in their workplace.
- (c) This does not mean that formal consultation is required before every task-specific assessment conducted in workplaces. It simply means that consultation should form part of the general risk assessment process.

### 5.3 Consultation Methods

- (a) There are a number of different ways to consult with staff, each having different benefits and disadvantages, each entity should review their consultation needs and decide from this what the best method is.
- (b) The different methods of consulting your staff include:
  - (i) face to face, directly with individuals;
  - (ii) indirectly with staff: and
  - (iii) with staff representatives.
- (c) Use a range of methods to suit the circumstances and use a combination if a single method is not suitable. There are various ways you can consult with staff face to face:
  - (i) one-to-one discussions - these can be particularly effective if you have a small business and have the opportunity to talk to your staff regularly;
  - (ii) regular walkabouts / OSH tours - If your business is larger, then you could try where undertaking regular OSH tours. You get to meet staff face to face, and they get to share ideas and concerns. If management are regularly approachable, staff are more likely to open up about the risks, especially if you then do something about the issues raised;
  - (iii) OSH as an agenda point on meetings – having OSH as a standing item on the agenda of routine team meetings where your staff views can be fed back to and so there is always an opportunity for OSH issues to be picked up;
  - (iv) special workforce meetings - these can be best when you need to call the whole workforce together for their views and opinions. This could be in addition to regular team meetings. At large meetings, the exchange of views and ideas might not be as effective as in smaller gatherings where people may feel more comfortable sharing their views;
  - (v) toolbox talks - arrange toolbox talks where you have short talks on specific OSH issues that show the relevance of a topic to particular jobs, for instance a talk about

manual handling for those doing jobs that involve lifting heavy goods. It allows you and your employees to explore the risks and think about ways to deal with them; and

- (vi) working groups - set up work groups to tackle specific OSH issues and explore ways of making a difference. The staff involved in the group should be directly involved with the issues being looked at so they can really contribute to solutions.
- (d) There are also indirect ways you can involve staff:
- (i) intranet - company intranet sites with safety and health information are convenient as they can feature news and request the views of all your staff. Keep the information updated and draw attention to new material so people who do not regularly check it will know what is happening in their workplace. If some staff do not have access to the site, the quality and range of views given may be compromised;
  - (ii) staff surveys can be useful in consulting your workforce, although a lack of trust can undermine surveys and reduce the return rate. Consider the literacy or language skills of the employees to make sure they can answer questions they understand. You can get an external organisation to run the staff survey so your staff feel they can say what they really think;
  - (iii) staff suggestion schemes - these can be useful if they are regularly used and acted upon. However, they may not work if staff believe they will not make a difference, or because you and your staff have already developed a good working relationship without the need for a suggestion box; and
  - (iv) notice boards and newsletters – they can be useful for sharing information as part of the consultation process, particularly if used together with other methods as this increases the chance of getting your messages across.

## 6. OSH Committee

- (a) *OSHAD-SF - Element 4 – Communication and Consultation* Section 3.2(c) sets a requirement on all entities / projects / facilities / sites with greater than fifty (50) staff, or as warranted by risk assessment, to establish an OSH Committee or equivalent. Staff and management shall be represented on and participate in OSH Committee activities. Duties of the OSH Committee shall include:
- (i) review of issues and circumstances in the workplace which may affect the health or safety of persons in the workplace, including OSH issues;
  - (ii) to promote co-operation between management and employees in achieving and maintaining safe and healthy working conditions;
  - (iii) to exercise such other functions and duties as may be prescribed or conferred on the Committee by the employer in assuring the safety and health of staff; and
  - (iv) the OSH Committee shall meet a minimum of 4 times a year. The employer shall provide facilities, resources and assistance to the OSH Committee as may reasonably be required for the purpose of carrying out the Committee's functions and duties.

### 6.1 Setting up an OSH Committee

- (a) Through consultation with your staff, the entity should decide on:
- (i) the principles of how the OSH committee will function so it is clear for all staff and members of the committee;
  - (ii) who the members will be;
  - (iii) what the committee will do;
  - (iv) how you will make decisions and deal with disagreements; and
  - (v) what resources representatives will need as committee members.

### 6.2 Terms of Reference

- (a) The best way to set out the basic rules and procedures of how the OSH committee will work is to have a written constitution (terms of reference) on what they will do to manage OSH and welfare together. This should include its:
- (i) purpose and objectives;
  - (ii) membership;
  - (iii) meeting arrangements; and
  - (iv) arrangements for reporting the outcome of meetings to staff.

### 6.3 Membership

- (a) There is no correct number of committee members because the circumstances will vary from entity to entity. Generally speaking, committee members can include:
- (i) management representatives that have the authority to give proper consideration to views and recommendations;

- (ii) staff representation who have knowledge of the work of those they represent;
  - (iii) representatives of others in the workplace such as contractors; and
  - (iv) co-opted employees and others. These are people who are included because of their specific competences such as the company doctor, OSH manager / adviser, and other specialists.
- (b) The committee should be chaired by a member of top management or a person with formal delegated authority and this person should have the authority to make decisions on issues that are raised. The OSH manager is normally the secretary of the committee.

#### 6.4 Agenda

- (a) There is no set rule as to what items should be included on the OSH committee agenda as these will differ between entities, however the following items should be considered as a minimum:
- (i) statistics on accident records, ill health and sickness absence;
  - (ii) accident investigations and subsequent action;
  - (iii) OSH management system updates / changes;
  - (iv) inspections and audits of the workplace;
  - (v) risk management program;
  - (vi) OSH training;
  - (vii) emergency procedures;
  - (viii) changes in the workplace affecting the OSH and welfare of staff; and
  - (ix) adequacy of OSH communications and publicity in the workplace.
- (b) The OSH committee can be powerful in making improvements in the workplace. When considering issues, the committee should:
- (i) discuss if action is needed;
  - (ii) make recommendations for agreed action;
  - (iii) record the discussion and actions in the minutes of the meeting (which should be accessible to the whole workforce); and
  - (iv) follow up the actions, then review them at a later date.
- (c) The outputs of the meeting should be recorded and the meeting minutes posted around the workplace. The minutes should also include ownership and timescales for any actions that have been agreed upon.

#### 6.5 Meeting Frequency, Assistance and Training

- (a) Section 3.2(f) of *OSHAD-SF - Element 4 – Consultation and Communication* requires entities with more than 50 staff to meet at least 4 times a year.
- (b) The meeting frequency for your OSH committee should be defined by the risks that are inherent within your undertaking and higher risk entities should meet on a more regular basis.

- (c) Entities should always try to plan meetings in advance, giving members and staff plenty of notice to allow them to prepare for the meeting and also for staff to put forward any issues that may be of a concern
- (d) Section 3.2(f) of *OSHAD-SF - Element 4 – Consultation and Communication* also requires entities to provide facilities, assistance and resources to the OSH committee as may be required for the committee to undertake their role.
- (e) Entities should provide adequate assistance for the OSH committee to function, this should extend to the use of suitable meeting rooms, access to relevant information, communication of meeting minutes and ensuring all staff have access to the minutes.
- (f) Entities should also consider if members of the committee require any training to undertake their role. If OSH committee members are going to be actively involved, there may be a need for training to ensure they can undertake the role.

## 7. References

- *OSHAD-SF – Element 2 – Risk Management*
- *OSHAD-SF – Element 3 – Management of Contractors*
- *OSHAD-SF – Element 5 – Training, Awareness and Competency*
- *OSHAD-SF – Element 8 – Consultation and communication*
- *OSHAD-SF – Element 9 – Compliance and Management Review*
- *OSHAD-SF – TG – Training, Awareness and Competency*
- *HSG263 - Involving your Workforce in Health and Safety - HSE Books - ISBN 978 0 7176 6227 2*



## 8. Document Amendment Record

Version	Revision Date	Description of Amendment	Page/s Affected
3.0	1 <sup>st</sup> July 2016	Change of Logo	All
		Change from AD EHS Center to OSHAD	throughout
		Change of document title: AD EHSMS RF to OSHAD-SF	Throughout
		EHS changes to OSH	Throughout
		Clause 6.3(b) updated to provide further clarification in requirements	13



