

# RELYING ON EXPERIENCE A RISKY BUSINESS

## – WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY INDUSTRY INSIGHT



### **Some workplaces rely on “they’ve been here for ages and know their stuff” – but when it comes to workplace safety, this is killing us.**

Too many businesses are not staying on top of their health and safety training requirements, instead relying on worker competency to keep people safe. And – as ACC and WorkSafe can attest – employee experience is no substitute for all-important safety training.

In 2019, a West Coast carpet layer with 17 years of experience died after using a strong solvent-based adhesive – known to be a health hazard – during installation. WorkSafe investigations discovered that not only did the company have no safe system for working with adhesives, but nor did they provide staff with any safety training, relying instead on the experience of their workers to keep themselves safe.

This devastating incident had a huge impact on the organisation (including a fine of \$60,000 and reparations of \$105,000), and more tragically, cost an employee his life and shattered the lives of his loved ones.

According to Safety 'n Action one of the safe ways to protect your people and your operation is through up to date, relevant training.

“Far too many people are being injured as a result of companies relying on ‘they know their stuff, they’ve been with us for years’. We need to change the narrative and increase the focus on health and safety training” says Nicholas Matzopoulos, National Trainer Director at Safety 'n Action.

Effective safety training prepares teams for the unexpected, giving them up to date knowledge of safe procedures and employer/worker responsibilities to keep sites and those around them safe from harm. It saves lives, reduces injuries, and helps ensure organisations across the country are successfully and safely achieving their goals. It also saves the country a lot of money – in 2020 alone, ACC spent a whopping \$872,358,896 on active claims.

As the country's leading provider of health and safety training, Safety 'n Action is committed to transforming New Zealand's health and safety culture, and their expert team delivers NZQA accredited training programmes that offer detailed awareness and the latest best practice guidance on workplace safety.

These programmes include:

- Health and Safety Rep Training – a practical framework to develop key skills and knowledge so staff can play an active role in their organisation's health and safety programme.
- Hazard and Risk Management Training – focusing on safe work practices and risk management in the workplace, this programme covers the rights and responsibilities for workplace health and safety according to the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.

And as Nicholas points out, a huge part of effective health and safety training includes following good practice guidelines and making sure your staff are refreshed on their Health and safety training, ensuring your workers are keeping up to date with procedures and good practice, keeping them safe.

An example of where effective training which may have prevented an incident where a man who lost his leg while working for a Hawke's Bay steel plate cutting company in 2017. His leg was crushed while using a gantry crane to move a package of steel and the WorkSafe investigation that followed found that although the organisation did have health and safety documentation, it was outdated – in some cases as old as 2003.

WorkSafe Investigation Area Manager Casey Broad noted, "The documentation was generalised and did not include a safe system of work document for the method being used. There was too much reliance on on-the-job training and instruction to manage hazards."

He went on to say, "Effective hazard identification and management, good training, and supervision of risky work were not being employed by the company and as a result, the victim has suffered life-changing injuries that should not have happened."

In addition, the company received a fine of \$275,000 and was ordered to pay reparations of \$87,497 and costs of \$7,380.

But this is just one example of the multitude of serious workplace incidents that occur across the country each year in a wide and diverse range of industries – and for Nicholas Matzopoulos and the Safety 'n Action team it's their driving force.

"Keeping people safe is our absolute top priority. Remember, we often don't know what we don't know. Training offers a fresh perspective on workplace hazards and the management of health and safety policies and procedures."