Supervision

Here the term is used to include ‘team leader’, or any other equivalent company designation.

Adequate supervision complements the provision of information, instruction and training to ensure that the health and safety policy of an organisation is effectively implemented and developed. Good supervision regimes can form a powerful part of a proper system of management control. There are two key aspects:

- **Task management**
  Supervisors, by example and discipline, are uniquely placed to influence how well organisations achieve health and safety objectives and what standards of performance are maintained. They can plan, direct, help, train, coach and guide staff to develop individual competence. They can also monitor performance by formal (e.g. assessment) and informal (spot checks) means.

- **Team building**
  Supervisors can encourage individuals to work together in pursuit of team objectives. This role can include leading team activities such as tool-box talks, team briefings and problem-solving exercises. It can also involve coaching and counselling to encourage and support the participation and involvement of employees and safety representatives. A particularly important objective is to improve understanding of the risks involved in the work and how they can be eliminated or better controlled.

It is management’s job to decide on the appropriate level of supervision for particular tasks. The level depends on the risks involved as well as the competence of employees to identify and handle them. In some cases, legal requirements state minimum supervision levels. In others, more supervision may be needed, for example employees new to a job, employees undergoing training or doing jobs which present special risks, e.g. working alone or at shift changeovers. But some supervision of fully competent individuals will always be needed to ensure that standards are being met consistently.

Supervisors and employees should exercise judgement and discretion, for example when making decisions on when to seek help or guidance or when to halt work because they consider it too dangerous to continue. But they should exercise this discretion within the framework of control established at the top of the organisation. Although authority to act can be delegated to supervisors and employees, the ultimate responsibility for complying with the employer’s legal duties cannot be delegated. It follows that management must ensure that those exercising discretion and judgement are competent to do so and have clear guidelines.

New methods of team working - often linked to widening job content and to more flexible working arrangements - can mean, for instance, that:

- some maintenance tasks become the responsibilities of the work group and the maintenance workers will join the production team;
- there is increased job variety for individuals and they have to become competent in new tasks;
- supervisors become responsible for areas of work which are outside their established expertise or experience.

Team and flexible working arrangements can increase the discretion available to supervisors and others. But where supervisors acquire wider responsibilities, they need to become familiar with new risks and with how these relate to activities of the whole group and to other groups.

**Diagram 4:** Levels of supervision are determined by the risk of the job and the competence of the person.


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