

FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

STUDY NOTE

EXAMINATION

STATION OFFICERS' EXAMINATION

PAPER

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

SUBJECT

HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE

ITEM

HEALTH AND SAFETY AUDITING AND
MONITORING

STUDY NOTE No.

3309

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY NOTE

This study note has been prepared as the basis of study in connection with the qualifying examinations for promotion.

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of the information contained in the study note and understand how it should be applied:

The 'References' made at the end of the Study Note are included for information only and candidates will not be expected to study these as part of the bibliography.

HEALTH AND SAFETY AUDITING AND MONITORING

1. Introduction

In order to maintain and improve health and safety in the workplace it is necessary to audit and monitor the performance of the health and safety function.

This study note briefly outlines the processes of monitoring, auditing and performance review, that a Station Officer should be familiar with in order to undertake the role of a manager within the Fire Service.

2. Measuring Performance

Fire brigades need to measure what they are doing to implement their health and safety policy:

- (a) To assess how effectively they are controlling risks; and
- (b) How well they are developing a positive health and safety culture.

A low accident rate, even over a period of years, is no guarantee that risks are being effectively controlled and will not lead to injuries, ill-health or loss of life in the future.

3. Information

There are two ways to generate information on health and safety performance:

- (a) Active Monitoring, which involves regular inspection and checking to ensure that standards are being implemented and controls are working. e.g. The cost of mending a broken stair is much cheaper than paying for the injuries which could result from someone falling down the stairs.
- (b) Reactive Monitoring, which involves identifying systems failures whether or not they result in injuries, illnesses or damage. It includes the monitoring of:
 - (i) Injuries and ill-health.
 - (ii) Damage to property.
 - (iii) Near misses.
 - (iv) Hazards.

4. Active Monitoring

This gives an organisation feedback on its performance before an accident, incident or ill health. It includes monitoring the achievement of specific plans and objectives, the operation of the health and safety management system, and compliance with performance standards. It provides a firm basis for decisions about improvements in risk control and the health and safety management systems.

Active monitoring measures the degree of success achieved and can reinforce positive management actions.

Examples of different forms of active monitoring:

- (a) Routine procedures to monitor specific objectives, eg quarterly or monthly reports or returns.
- (b) Periodic examination of documents to check that systems relating to the promotion of the health and safety culture is complied with. One example might be the way in which suitable objectives have been established for each Station Commander/Section Head; regular review of performance; assessment and recording of training needs; and delivery of suitable training.
- (c) The systematic inspection of premises, plant and equipment by Station Commanders and Safety Representatives or other employees to ensure the continued effective operation of workplace equipment.
- (d) Environmental monitoring and health surveillance to check on the effectiveness of health control measures and to detect early signs of harm to firefighters' health.
- (e) Systematic direct observation of work and behaviour by the Junior Officers to assess compliance with procedures and rules, particularly those directly concerned with risk control.
- (f) Consideration of regular reports on health and safety performance by the Chief Fire Officer and principal management team.

5. Reactive Monitoring

Reactive systems, by definition, are triggered after an event and include identifying and reporting:

- (a) Injuries and cases of ill health; (including monitoring of sickness absence records).
- (b) Other losses, such as damage to property.
- (c) Incidents, including those with the potential to cause injury, ill health or loss.
- (d) Hazards.
- (e) Weakness or omissions in performance standards.

Each of the above provides opportunities for a brigade to check performance, learn from mistakes, and improve the health and safety management system and risk control.

Information gathered from investigations is a useful way to reinforce key health and safety messages. Investigations may also provide valuable information in the event of an insurance claim or legal action.

6. Reporting

Collecting information on serious injuries and ill health should not present major problems for brigades, but learning about minor injuries, other losses, incidents and hazards can prove more challenging.

Accurate reporting can be promoted by:

- (a) Training which clarifies the underlying objectives and reasons for identifying such events.
- (b) A culture which emphasises an observant and responsible approach and the importance of having systems of control in place before harm occurs.
- (c) Open, honest communication in a just environment, rather than a tendency merely to allocate blame.
- (d) Cross-referencing and checking first-aid treatments, health records, maintenance reports and insurance claims to identify any otherwise unreported events.

7. Auditing

Brigades can maintain and improve their ability to manage risks by learning from experience through the use of audits.

All control systems tend to deteriorate over time or to become obsolete as a result of change. Auditing supports monitoring by providing managers with information on how effectively the plans and the components of the health and safety management system are being implemented. It should also provide a check on the adequacy and effectiveness of the management arrangements and control measures.

Auditing is defined as:

The structured process of collecting independent information on the efficiency, effectiveness and reliability of the total health and safety management system.

Drawing up plans for any necessary corrective actions must then follow.

The aims of auditing should be to establish that:

- (a) Appropriate management arrangements are in place.
- (b) Adequate control measures exist, are implemented and consistent with the hazard profile/risks of the organisation.
- (c) Plans are being effectively implemented.

Various methods can be used to achieve this and some components of the system do not need to be audited as often as others. For instance an audit of the management arrangements and the overall capability of an organisation to manage health and safety need not be done as often as an audit to verify the implementation of risk control measures.

The auditing process involves:

- (a) Collecting information about the health and safety management system; and
- (b) Making judgements about its adequacy and performance.

A team approach, involving managers, safety representatives and employees is an effective way to widen involvement and co-operation in devising and implementing the programme.

8. Collecting Information

Auditors have three information sources on which to draw:

- (a) Interviewing individuals, to gain information about the operation of the health and safety management system and the perceptions, knowledge, understanding, management practices, skill and competence of managers and employees at various levels in the organisation.
- (b) Examining documents, assessing records, risk control measures, performance standards, procedures and instructions for completeness, accuracy and reliability together with the implications for competence and understanding - in practice these may need to be reviewed in preparing the audit to identify issues to follow up and people to interview.
- (c) Visual observation of physical conditions and work activities to examine compliance with legal requirements and verify the implementation and effectiveness of risk control measures.

9. Audit Standards

The adequacy of a health and safety management system is judged by making a comparison between what is found against a relevant standard or benchmark.

If there are no clear standards, the assessment process will be unreliable.

Legal standards, HSE guidance and applicable industry standards should be used to assist in forming an audit judgement.

It is important that auditing is not perceived as a faultfinding activity but as a valuable contribution to the health and safety management system and learning process. Auditing should recognise positive achievements as well as areas for improvement.

In some audits, scoring systems are used to complement judgements and recommendations. This can help with comparing audit scores over time or between sites, but there is no evidence to suggest that quantifying the results yields a better response than an approach providing only qualitative evidence.

To maximise the benefits, competent people independent of the area or activities being audited should conduct audits. This can be achieved by using staff from different sections, departments or sites to audit their colleagues or by using external consultants.

Brigades can use either their own self-developed auditing system, those marketed as proprietary systems, or a combination of both. It is unlikely that any one proprietary system will suit a brigade perfectly. Usually a scheme has to be tailored to individual requirements and the costs and potential benefits are likely to influence the choice.

10. Reviewing Performance

Reviewing is part of the process of making judgements about the adequacy of performance and taking decisions about the nature and timing of the actions necessary to remedy deficiencies. Brigades need to have feedback to see if the health and safety management system is working effectively as designed. The main sources of information come from measuring activities and from audits of the risk control measures.

Feeding information on success and failure back into the system is an essential element in motivating employees to maintain and improve performance. Successful organisations emphasise positive reinforcement and concentrate on encouraging progress on those indicators, which demonstrate improvements in risk control.

Reviewing should be a continuous process undertaken at different levels within the organisation and should include responses made:

- (a) By first-line supervisors or other managers to remedy failures to implement risk control measures which they have observed in the course of routine activities.
- (b) To remedy sub-standard performance identified by active and reactive monitoring.
- (c) To the assessment of plans at individual section or site level.
- (d) To the results of audits.

Review plans may include the review of individuals, sections; stations or the whole brigade, to a timetable that is appropriate.

The Brigade would decide on the frequency of the reviews at each level and devise reviewing activities to suit the measuring and auditing activities and should:

- (a) Establish who is responsible for implementation; and
- (b) Set deadlines for completion.

Key performance indicators for reviewing overall performance can include:

- (a) Assessment of the degree of compliance with health and safety system requirements;
- (b) Identification of areas where the health and safety is absent or inadequate;
- (c) Assessment of the achievement of specific objectives and plans; and
- (d) Accident, ill health and incident data accompanied by analysis of both the immediate and underlying causes, trends and common features.

These indicators are consistent with the development of a positive health and safety culture. They emphasise achievement and success rather than merely measuring failure by looking only at accident data.

Organisations may also benchmark their performance against other organisations by comparing accident rates and management practices and techniques with other brigades to provide a different perspective and new insights on health and safety management systems.

References

Successful Health and Safety Management