

Safety observation in Daily Use

Antti Leino

The accident rate in the construction sector is the highest of any sector in Finland. One reason for this is that working conditions and risk on construction sites change daily.

Planning for safe work conditions is embedded in all project planning phases. Unfortunately, however, some hazards arise only after the work has been started; possibly because of deficiencies in planning, changing weather conditions, hazards caused by other working groups, etc. There is a constant need for worker vigilance and active risk identification and response.

To help in this process, every new worker entering a construction site will be given site safety induction, including the use of a safety observation card. Workers will get a block of ten of these cards. Each card has a list of the most common risk areas at construction sites, such as scaffolding, railings, excavations and housekeeping. Any hazard identified by the worker can simply be ticked. On the back of the card there is space for the worker to fill in information relating to the identified hazard: what, where, how and why, who/to whom, consequences and suggested action.

The card is then passed on to the supervisor who will go through the observation and give feedback to the worker. Feedback will be given personally or at the weekly site meeting in which all workers participate.

The supervisor is required to record the observation in an intranet-based safety information system. Email notification is sent to the site construction manager and company safety personnel. Some observations will be published in company safety bulletin. This is meant to promote company-wide learning from near-miss incidents.

It seems that safety observations promote accident prevention in the following ways:

1. They encourage workers and supervisors to identify hazards and to correct deficiencies immediately.
2. They promote communications and learning.
3. They provide information for safety management and decision-making both on the construction site and at corporate level.

Skanska Finland has been collecting safety observations since 2004. It seems that the number of safety observations is a leading indicator of the accident rate, in that the more workers observe hazards and the more supervisors manage and communicate findings, the fewer accidents will occur.

Implementation of daily safety observation is rather simple. Card can easily be modified to match the most common hazards at workplace. Cost will increase if the organisation decides to have a safety information system in addition to the card system.