



HSWA STORY



Empowering workers to become health and safety leaders



“(Owner) James challenged us all to have a go at coming up with a one minute kōrero for the health and safety induction. Everyone was pretty shy about doing that but he said: “Here is your mountain, conquer it when you’re ready” and just kept reminding and encouraging us.

Layton Vaele, former trainee, now site foreman

No-one gets more than a few steps onto the Wellington Pipelines worksite before someone appears, iPad in hand, to take you through the safety induction kōrero.

On this occasion, it's Safety Supervisor Creedence Wilkinson. Visitors' names, business and purpose of visit are logged; Creedence checks their personal protective equipment and runs through potential risks.

The iPad is a recent innovation, introduced in response to feedback from workers James and Vanessa Fruean's Wainuiomata-based company introduced the change as part of a highly effective approach to engage workers in health and safety.

The 26-strong team are a mixture of nationalities and the company's methods are based on tikanga principles, building strong relationships and excellent communication.

The company does water and drainage infrastructure work for local authorities. Key risks include construction processes, machinery, plant, deep excavations, underground services and utilities, slips, trips, abrasions, noise and dust.

“We used to have a paper-based system but it mostly sat on a shelf,” says Creedence. “James talked to all of us about how he needed to find a system we'd use and what would work for us. Most of the boys said they prefer electronic devices, so they developed a cloud-based system.

WORKER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The best outcomes are achieved when a business and its workers work together on health and safety. Worker Engagement and Participation is about having planned ways for:

- > workers to give input on issues which will (or are likely to) affect their health or safety. This includes asking for and taking into account their views, and
- > workers to improve work health and safety on an ongoing basis (eg by raising concerns or suggesting improvements).

This will help you and your business to make better decisions – and keep your people and productivity thriving.

WSNZ_2118_OCT 16

WELLINGTON PIPELINE'S STORY



“Now we’ve got iPads on every site and everyone has access to them. It’s much better. There’s less clutter, we all like using them. We can refer back to previous records – there are no bits of paper to lose.”

Site foreman Layton Vaele was 16 when he joined the company – his dad was a foreman and asked James to give him a trial. Layton recalls how soon after he joined, James found him “standing round with his hands in his pockets”.

“I said I hadn’t been given a job,” says Layton. “He gave me a broom and said ‘if you haven’t got a job, sweep the street or tidy the site.’”

A few years on and James cites Layton as his “bullet-proof foreman – experienced, with strong leadership skills and passionate about health and safety.”

Layton says developing a health and safety culture across the team has taken time, but now it’s second nature.

“Every day starts with a toolbox meeting. We stand in a circle and I get people talking about the day’s work plan. We all speak in common language here – no jargon. We discuss who’s doing what and talk about risks.

“The boys chip in. One raised a concern this week about a courier jumping our safety fence to take a short cut, or they might say space is getting tight on the street and we’ll talk about how we’ll work round that stuff. They also update me through the day, like a reminder about where the underground services are.”

James says whakamā is an issue – but one they’ve overcome through encouraging workers and helping them steadily build their confidence – empowering more than enforcing.

“A lot of the boys weren’t comfortable about speaking up at first and getting past that takes time,” says Layton.

“James challenged us all to have a go at coming up with a one minute kōrero for the health and safety induction. Everyone was pretty shy about doing that but he said: “Here is your mountain, conquer it when you’re ready” and just kept reminding and encouraging us.

“In the end one of the boys got up and did it and everyone clapped and cheered him. We’re using that one because he totally nailed it.

“Everyone appreciates the approach to health and safety. Communication is much better; everyone knows what they need to do and what other people are doing, no-one’s running round like a headless chicken.”

Ultimately the team feel empowered to contribute, because they know their contribution will be valued and acted upon. Worker input has shaped many decisions, from the new kind of hard hats they use, to current trials of protective full face masks.

“You can be led or you can be a leader,” says James. “The best thing about building confidence and empowering our boys is that they have come to recognise that it’s harder being led – so they have stepped up to work with us on this and share responsibility. That’s a huge benefit when you’re running a business – I know they always have my back.”

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KEY TAKE OUTS FROM WELLINGTON PIPELINES

Empowering workers on health and safety means:

- > people take responsibility
- > systems are effective and well-used
- > communication improves
- > the business benefits from developing talent.

For more examples and information visit [worksafe.govt.nz/hswa](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/hswa)