Talking the same language

Stephen Shield thought he was just making his job a little easier but his innovation ended up changing the reporting culture of an entire company and winning him a top safety award.

Words: Helen Borger
Tinkering with electronics and computer programs is a favourite pastime of Stephen Shield, zone production manager at BOC. So much so that he likes to bring a bit of this hobby to his paid work. As he goes about his job he is always on the lookout for new technology to improve how he gets things done.

Not long ago BOC contended with a number of different audit requirements that were managed in various systems and kept in a range of documents and locations across the company. This system of keeping tabs on an organisation, which supplies compressed and bulk gases, chemicals and equipment around the globe, was convoluted to say the least.

When it came to safety audits at the many BOC worksites, like other managers Shield was using the company-sanctioned paper diary system. He says it was a good idea in theory because after walking around a worksite and discussing the hazards and risks with the workers and how they might be controlled, the diary was a convenient place to report on the visit.

In practice, however, he says the diary was sometimes left at home and it wasn’t always easy to describe the nature of problems identified at worksites in the diary’s three allocated lines. Also, information about the problems was not always transferred in a timely fashion from...
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the diary to reports that could be shared and acted on quickly, he adds.

So Shield set off in search of a tool to make his working life easier. However, he also ended up making BOC safer. In doing so, he took out the Ian Chisholm Award for the Best Individual WHS Achievement at the 2015 NSCA Foundation/GIO Workers Compensation National Safety Awards of Excellence in October last year.

Taking his company-supplied iPhone, he looked for an app that could replicate a better version of the diary on the phone. “I came across iAuditor, which is a free safety audit and checklist app,” he says. “It allows BOC templates to be created and uploaded to the phone. The app isn’t restricted to two to three lines, and up to 30 to 40 images can also be included.

There is no limit on the information that can be uploaded. But to keep files from getting too big, limits are put on file sizes, and the text field—while larger than the diary—is limited in size and to bullet points.”

The templates cover key issues managers must address when visiting particular BOC worksites. As an example, one template includes issues such as site-specific manual handling, hazard controls, personal protective equipment (PPE), contractor approvals and induction, pre-approval of engineering changes, vehicle routing and speed, emergency arrangements and plant maintenance.

Using only the iPhone, Shield is able to walk around and audit a BOC worksite, taking notes and photos, inputting all his findings into iAuditor and emailing a report with images to the site manager almost immediately. On top of this, reports can be emailed to anyone in the company, providing all managers with quick and reliable data that can be shared instantly with teams. Whomever sees the report gains an immediate understanding of the type and severity of the risks.

He emailed his first iPhone report to his director. “He loved it and shared it with others who also loved it,” he says. The grapevine worked overtime and soon

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many on the management team wanted to continue using it. The system's biggest plus is that it captures the information there and then in an already reportable format, so the information is handled once. Hazards and risks do not need to be noted in paper diaries and then placed in the system at a later time or left until the monthly report.

Due to the app's popularity and Shield demonstrating its positive reporting functions, BOC requested that he complete a suite of apps for the wider business. The apps were created in 60 hours and tested over two months.

The apps work so well that many hazards are reported early and often—so many in fact that BOC has needed to find a new way to keep up with them. Big television screens have been installed in worksites, he says, so everyone can see where hazard closeouts are up to. It prompts those responsible to ensure the hazards are addressed, he adds.

As well as developing the apps, Shield has sponsored their roll-out through BOC. This has included showcasing the apps and training the management team about downloading and using the apps as a safety tool and creating reports.

Shield's innovation has also proven to have even broader application. BOC's regional leadership team (RLT) also see it as a way for managers to demonstrate that they are taking safety seriously and not just reporting on what is happening on the shopfloor. Managers are required to report up the chain of command about what they have contributed to toolbox talks, what training they have done, and if they are on top of the regulations, among other issues. In particular, the RLT sees it as one way of keeping on top of due diligence.

Shield's innovation has not only improved reporting, it has also boosted safety and reduced business costs—as the reporting system is now a single data collection point. Plans are also underway to roll out the apps to team leaders.
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