

Case Study: Transpacific Industries

Transpacific is one of New Zealand's leading recycling, waste management and industrial services companies. The company has worked with Workbase, running workplace literacy programmes across 11 of its sites in New Zealand.

Transpacific Industries found that workplace literacy training has made a big difference to its endeavours to develop a health and safety culture throughout its business. A large part of the recycling, waste management and industrial services company's operations involve working in high risk environments such as confined spaces, heights and around heavy machinery and energy systems.

Managing Director Tom Nickels says the company places employee safety above all other objectives yet it struggled to get some of its team members to comply with some of the more complex documentation requirements.

"Reading and writing issues hindered our progress towards developing a safety culture and we knew that literacy and numeracy were an important part of the cultural change jigsaw."

The company put 25 employees at one of its sites through a literacy training programme, including operators, general duties staff, managers and employees with English as a second language.

Participants became far more confident as a result of their improved literacy, numeracy and language skills. Now they actively participate in the company's toolbox meetings and monthly health and safety meetings.

"Before the literacy and numeracy course it was difficult to get them interested in these vital employee communication avenues," says Mr Nickels. "Now we have people volunteering to deliver tool box talks to their peers and they are more confident to let managers know if they have safety questions or concerns."

Mr Nickels says the literacy and numeracy programme did more than reduce accidents and incidents; it resulted in the workforce regarding health and safety as part of life by resolving their fears of paperwork.

"Employees who would once run a mile from a booklet or printed page now carry safety tool-kit pads with them and plan the task's safety aspects before they begin." He notes that employees with literacy and numeracy problems expend a lot of energy on working out how to hide the problem and try to justify why they should not have to 'fill in all this stupid paperwork'.

"These same people now pro-actively ask management for the correct documents such as permits before they start a job. We have found literacy and numeracy training to be a powerful tool for changing the health and safety culture at this site."

As a result, Transpacific Industries has introduced the workplace literacy training programme to other sites.

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