

**RoSPA**

accidents don't have to happen

# RoSPA's Behavioural Safety e-book



# Contents

What is Behavioural based Safety?	03
Different approaches to Behavioural Safety	04
What are the key elements of Behavioural Safety?	06
Safety Leadership	08
Safety Systems	10
General Safety Behaviour Management	11
Behaviour Modification	12
Accident Investigation	14
Near Miss Reporting	15

# 1. What is Behavioural Based Safety?

The belief that injuries and illnesses are a result of 'unsafe decisions' by workers underpinned by a variety of factors

To prevent this 'unsafe behaviour' staff at all levels should identify and target unsafe behaviours and work together to reduce the impact of these.

Many organisations now promote the vision of an accident and injury free environment. How people behave at work plays an important part in achieving this vision and requires safety behaviours that are in sync at all levels.

It is now widely recognised that such change will only be achieved through the development of a specific behavioural strategy, and this area of safety science has competing perspectives on why accidents occur at work.

Understanding how to define **behavioural safety** is therefore vital for an organisation in order to decide how you are going to support the behavioural change required. **Three broad approaches to behavioural safety management have developed over the last century and all three still play a part in the modern safety world.**

## 2. Different approaches to Behavioural Safety?

**Historically, evidence collected in the workplace on accident, incident and near miss reports has been used as part of a behaviourist explanation of human behaviour and workplace management.**

It strongly suggests that safety performance was largely a function of how people behaved at work and therefore how workers should be controlled by management. The psychology of '**Behaviourism**' as it came to be known viewed human beings as having no free will and became primarily concerned with using observable behaviour to identify how human error displayed itself in human behaviour.

In more recent times this 'behaviourist approach has been linked into the Safety Management Systems (SMS) of companies with the creation of Safe Operating Protocols (SOPs) and Safe Systems of Work (SSOW). Connected to modern behaviourist approaches is the concept of reward and punishment which underpin the approach looking for workers observable errors and violations.

A more recent approach, the '**Social Psychological**' approach, has suggested that safety decision making in human beings is a more complex area. It suggests that the safety choices people make are based upon how they process information in any given cultural social context. Such information processing can be a conscious act, and from this flows a decision to behave in one way or another. It can also however be a subliminal/automatic level where the resulting behaviour becomes habitual rather than being consciously determined. In both cases, the result can be human beings engaging in unnecessary **risk** taking or an unsafe act.

The most recent approach, often referred to as the **Anti-Behaviourist Systems Approach**, adds to the thinking around behavioural safety by suggesting that both these approaches have failed to fully appreciate the organisational pressures on staff.

The next page outlines these three different views of human behaviour in relation to workplace safety.

Behaviourist	Social Psychological	Anti-Behaviourist Systems Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The roots of a Behaviourism approach lie in the work of Frederick Taylor (Taylorism) from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century</li> <li>• Behaviourism saw human error as caused by the 'moral, physical and mental' shortcomings of workers</li> <li>• Identifies human behaviour as the predominant cause of workplace accidents through human error and violation of best method processes</li> <li>• The approach sees the worker as someone whose behaviour needs to be controlled by managers</li> <li>• The management know best ways of doing things and designing safe systems of work and therefore workers should follow the 'one best method' approach</li> <li>• The approach strongly believes in the control of behaviour through reward and punishment systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roots lie in cognitive psychology and social psychology</li> <li>• People are seen as complex individuals with personal value and belief systems, whose safety behaviour is influenced by social issues like organisational culture</li> <li>• Focuses on the links between organisational leadership, culture, the physical environment and the individual social context</li> <li>• The approach believes in the use of extensive training which recognises human behaviour issues and therefore 'trains out' errors and violations through values and ethics</li> <li>• Can be linked to a behaviourist approach and accepts that the use of reward and punishment as control options are valid</li> <li>• Links to workers' ability to cognitively process information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The most recent approach to thinking about and managing workplace behaviour</li> <li>• The approach believes that the roots of most accidents and incidents lie in the system problems within which workers make safety decisions</li> <li>• Human behaviour needs to be understood as a complex response to the multiple factors operating in modern businesses</li> <li>• Workers are often the recipients of latent problems remote from the actual workplace (e.g. design and planning of work)</li> <li>• In safety human beings should be seen as a resource to harness rather than a problem to control</li> <li>• Worker resilience and the ability to make safety decisions is key to safety management</li> </ul>

# 3. What are the key elements of Behavioural Based Safety?

**Influence over behaviour can be exerted at different levels and through different means. All of these require attention if the vision of an accident and injury free culture is to be a realistic target:**

## Safety Leadership

Safety leadership provides the wider context in which workplace behaviour is managed. Leaders exert influence through creating and communicating a safety vision, through setting expectations, and through displays of positive leadership models.

## Safety Systems

Part of the delivery of this vision will be provided by the nature and scope of the organisation's safety systems and the training associated with these.

These systems will include a number of important functional aspects such as safety procedures, audit and evaluation strategies, safety management and safety incentives.

# What are the key elements of Behavioural Based Safety?

## Management Culture

The day-to-day management of these systems and requirements is something that becomes manifest in the role of managers and supervisors as safety management is usually a front line responsibility. In turn, the management of workplace behaviour will need to be considered in the wider culture of the organisation and its production pressures which may affect safety decisions, albeit subliminally.

## Production

Each of these various layers are important and, given that they all have the principal function of influencing what people do, to achieve best practice they need to be based upon established behavioural theory and principles. They also need to recognise the real world of business and the pressures related to production and profit. Any behavioural safety system needs to recognise and include a focus on each of these elements as well as engaging effectively with its staff.

**This complete approach needs to recognise that human beings and their decision making is complex and that a simple behavioural solution may not actually work as anticipated for all staff or in all situations**

## 4. Safety Leadership

Whatever view of behavioural safety is followed, the behaviour of leaders is critical in terms of how their behaviour symbolically influences the workforce. The higher the leader in positional terms, the more critical this can become. In view of this, it is most important to focus upon this aspect when developing a behavioural strategy and, ideally, it should be the first area to be the focus of development.

Leaders have the power to exert influence in a number of ways:

Through their safety vision and how they articulate, communicate and reinforce this

By displaying safe behaviour

By recognizing safe behaviour

By outlining expectations and holding people accountable for these expectations

Through how they respond to critical incidents or events

# Safety Leadership

Clearly, leadership involves much more than simply providing good role models for others to follow. In addition, given that leaders are prone, like everybody else, to having preferred and non-preferred behaviours, there is a need to focus on ensuring that leaders not only identify what they should be doing as far as safety leadership is concerned, but also to ensure that they actually carry out their declared intentions.

They should also try to recognise that when errors occur or when procedures are apparently not followed this may be related to a whole range of situations, context only the workers are aware of. Exploration of the thinking behind such decisions is therefore vital in preventing these same problems reoccurring.



# 5. Safety Systems

## Positive Proactive Safety Culture

What is evident is that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to demand behavioural compliance. The success of a behavioural safety strategy relies on the willingness of the workforce to want to consistently engage in “[best practice](#)” behaviour. What this implies is the need to ensure that when extra effort is required there is something in it for those being asked to make the additional effort to change. This recognises that motivation plays a key part in people’s choice of behaviour – people can and will change their ways as long as they can see there is some positive outcome available to them for making the extra effort required.

## Influencing Safety Culture

In this context, the lure of reducing the possibility of getting hurt is not enough because getting hurt is a low probability event that people think will never happen to them. To encourage the right behaviours, what is required is a different positive outcome that is more immediate and more certain. Leaders, managers and supervisors have a key role to play here for they typically have the power to influence the outcomes (consequences) that workers experience when they behave in a certain way. The need here is for those in positions of management regularly and systematically to deliver recognition for effort and progress as well as achievement.

## Whole Workforce Engagement

This is something that cannot be left to the workforce. A significant mistake will be made if management regards behaviour safety as something that they need to hand over to the workforce. How those at the top of the organisation behave sends signal down through the rest of the organisation. Behavioural safety must involve the whole organisation who should feel they are partners in creating a safe and fair safety culture.

# 6. General Safety

## Behaviour Management

The role of the leaders, managers and supervisors at a holistic level is critical in the overall management of workplace safety. It follows therefore that these people at all levels need effective skills, and are able to employ them successfully in an aligned way, if influence over human safety behaviour is to be exerted. Naturally, the success of the management can also be related to the success that those who manage them have over their own behaviour. There is also little point in having a management ethos for health and safety if this is not in turn aligned with the general organisational management.

It is now well understood that simply telling people what to do is unlikely to be a totally successful strategy as people do not always do as they are told and typically resent that approach. More recently, safety management has seen an increasing emphasis on the use of coaching to *shape* the required behaviours. In particular, effective behaviour management needs to incorporate the following behaviours:

- Clarifying expectations and the behaviours associated with effective safety performance
- Ensuring people have the ability and capability to perform to these standards
- Setting measurable goals that relate to the expectations and measuring these regularly with a specific focus on what people do (i.e. their behaviours)
- Providing coaching and feedback to help people shape up to these behaviours
- Providing recognition on a regular basis when people engage in the right behaviours

# 7. Behaviour Modification

A safe habit exists when a behaviour is performed safely 100% of the time, by 100% of the workforce irrespective of any change in the work conditions. By creating safe habits, we remove unnecessary risk taking and also free up mental capacity to deal with the unexpected and critical hazard and risk issues.

The main requirements for the development of a safe habit are:

- Those expecting to carry out the behaviour must be capable of so doing and have the frequent opportunity to practice the behaviour
- And when they do, they must receive positive reinforcement for carrying out the behaviour
- The safety habit must be one that the staff have bought into and have ownership of
- Implementation of any behaviour programme must have agreed aims for the whole company at all levels
- A flexible approach to enable variations between different parts of the organisation if the existing culture is variable

These requirements are well established in behavioural science. A systematic approach to behaviour change (behaviour modification) creates safe habits through the active and systematic application of positive reinforcement, which because it represents an outcome that people value and want, encourages repeated occurrences of the behaviour. Such repetition is the basis of learned patterns of behaviour that then occurs automatically – habits!

A slightly different approach comes from the Social Psychological arena which suggests there are five steps to behaviour change. (*Prochaska and DiClemente 1983*)

**Stage 1: Pre-Contemplation – The individual does not intend to change behaviour**



**Stage 2: Contemplation – The individual intends to take action.**



**Stage 3: Preparation – The individual prepares to take action.**



**Stage 4: Action – The individual makes overt changes to their behaviour.**

## 8. Accident Investigation

This is an area where significant behavioural safety issues might be uncovered which can affect safety within a company. Unfortunately, many investigations fail at the first hurdle because the investigators immediately start to use 'hindsight biases' (knowing what happened and the outcome as part of their investigative perspective).

The key for any investigation is trying to remain open minded and trying to see the decision making process that led from safe behaviour to unsafe behaviour from the point of view of the person whose error or apparent violation led to what occurred.

Exploration of these pinch point decision moments from the workers point of view might be crucial in really identifying unsafe behaviour and whether another worker might make the same decisions in the same circumstances again.

**Unfortunately, many investigations fail at the first hurdle because the investigators immediately start to use 'hindsight biases'**

# 9. Near Miss Reporting

**An unplanned event or situation that could have resulted in injury, illness, damage or loss but did not do so due to chance, corrective action or timely intervention**

If there is one issue which gives an insight to behaviour management and the cultural values of an organisation, it is 'near miss' management.

If the staff do not understand the importance of this area and find the whole process too bureaucratic, then the reporting of these and the lost learning opportunities may eventually lead to a serious accident. Whichever model an organisation looks at regarding the relationship between 'near misses' and serious accidents, it is clear that there is an inverse relationship between them.

## Key issues which might reduce or prevent reporting

- Uncertain or unclear definition of 'near miss'
- Poor design of the 'near miss' form including completion issues
- Fear of punishment if you make a mistake!
- Lack of recognition/positive feedback
- Peer pressure from mates
- Personal reputation – 'Do Gooder'
- Deadlines – how important it is to the organisation

# About RoSPA

RoSPA (The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) is a registered charity and the UK's leading safety organisations. Through our [workplace safety training](#), [consultancy](#), [fleet](#), [awards](#) and [membership services](#), we work with organisations within the UK and overseas.

## Why choose RoSPA for Behavioural Safety training?

- We help organisations to effect real, lasting change – avoiding the 'safety plateau'
- Our trainers understand how easy it can be to fall into a safety rut, and why continuous improvement is so important
- RoSPA has remained an instrumental force in every piece of UK safety legislation for almost [100 years](#) and continues to set the standard in training health and safety professionals
- RoSPA runs this behavioural safety training course as an in-house option, enabling businesses to train more employees and tailor the course to specific requirements
- Our suite of complementary practical [risk assessment](#) courses include [accident investigation](#), [COSHH](#), [DSE](#), [fire risk assessment](#) and [Managing Occupational Road Risk \(MORR\)](#)
- Expert tuition with a practical emphasis is provided by our professional CMIOSH-qualified trainers, many of whom hold a [City & Guilds](#) teaching qualification
- We equip delegates with practical skills they can put to good use as soon as they get back to the workplace. RoSPA supports those who want to further develop their careers, including those who hold the [NEBOSH Diploma](#) and [QSA Auditors](#) and their managers
- Experience developing and delivering training courses means we understand [what businesses really need](#) from health and safety training
- Courses are run by trainers who are also [behavioural safety consultants](#), so they practise what they preach on a regular basis
- Custom training materials are developed in-house to ensure quality and flexibility
- Discounts are available for RoSPA members



accidents don't have to happen

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

RoSPA  
RoSPA House  
28 Calthorpe Road  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham  
B15 1RP  
+44 0121 248 2000

RoSPA Scotland  
Livingston House  
43 Discovery Terrace  
Edinburgh  
EH14 4AP  
+44 0131 449 9378



[www.rosipa.com](http://www.rosipa.com)