

INDUSTRY STORY

FPS talks about the unexpected business benefits of setting up a H&S Committee

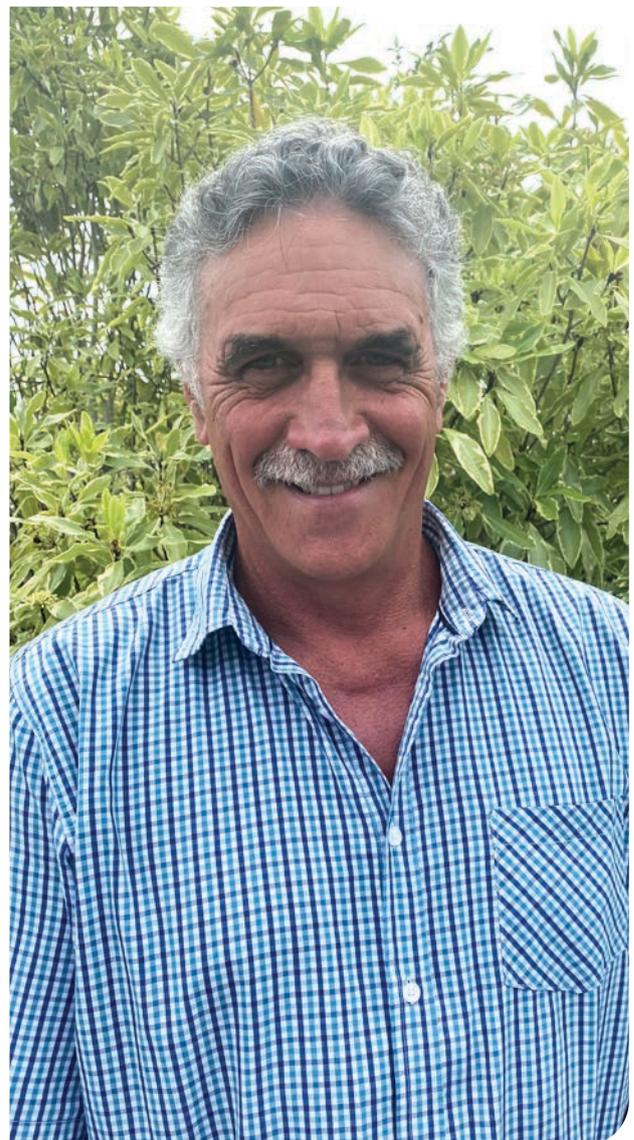
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► Why did you set up a Health and Safety Committee?

We realised that we had a legal requirement to set up Health and Safety Committee, or at least to consult with everyone about doing that. Initially no one wanted to be on the committee because they saw it as an enforcement role. But they did like the idea of having a place where they could come together and discuss issues. So, we began meeting and what we quickly realised was that the discussions went way beyond core health and safety. We were talking about all kinds of things, like how we organise our work, what the programme was, what training we needed, how the equipment was performing, and how crews were getting along together. So, we agreed to expand the role of the group to be a leadership and consultation Forum.

► How does the Forum help you run a better business?

The payback has been immense. I'm finding out loads of things I never knew about before and we are able to sort out issues before they turn into big problems. Sometimes we talk about core health and safety stuff – like PPE that's not quite right. Other times we talk about things that have an impact on health and safety, like training or managing work pressures.



Kevin Ihaka, DIRECTOR, FOREST PROTECTION SERVICES (FPS), NGĀTI KAHUNGUNU

Other times it's just pure business stuff, like who knows someone we could think about hiring, or how we are going to deal with re-work or a customer with a problem. The crews share good ideas and help each other deal with issues. I can also explain to them some of the business issues or pressures we're under, so they understand why decisions get made and can take that information back to the crews. It just helps things run much more smoothly.

► **What do you talk about?**

Probably about a quarter of our time is spent on core health and safety, including discussing incidents. About another quarter is spent on things that affect health and safety, like training, crew dynamics or people's mental wellbeing. Around half our time is spent on business issues. This can be anything from frustrations over equipment not coming back from the workshop fast enough, to dealing with quality control issues, to discussing the upcoming work programme.

► **What's an example of how the Forum has helped improve health and safety?**

We noticed a lot of people were damaging their chaps while they were thinning. I was worried about that because chaps are the last line of defence from people cutting themselves. During one meeting someone mentioned a member who'd never cut his chaps, so we decided to find out why that was. The group spent about half a day talking to the guy and found out it was all about how he positioned his chainsaw when he was working and walking. They wrote up what they learned and that's become part of our training material.

► **How did you set up the group to make sure it would work well?**

We wanted to have open, productive conversations. So, we drew up terms of reference that said people could speak their minds without fear of repercussions – nothing they said in the meeting would be held against them outside of it. We also drew up a set of values to guide what the Forum would focus on, and how they'd make decisions. Forum members chose those values, not me, and they revolve around the concept of professionalism, and what that means to them. I made a commitment to base all my decisions on these values, and the Forum could hold me to account for that. In return, they made a commitment to live these values in their work, both at the Forum and in the forest.

FPS values

Overarching value: Professionalism

Which at FPS means:

- » Inclusion
- » Compliance
- » Honesty
- » Appearance
- » Safety
- » Environment

► **What are the challenges of running a Forum like this?**

The biggest challenges are building trust and finding time. You need to build trust so people will open up and tell you what's actually going on. The terms of reference and values really helped us build that trust. Finding time to hold the meetings is also hard when so much is going on. You just have to keep reminding yourself that a group like this is an investment and it does pay off.

► **Would you recommend setting up a Forum like this to others?**

I would highly recommend having a Forum like this to any forestry business. You might run it differently from us. But something along these lines is great for improving communication with your workers. Yes, it's a legal requirement but it's also just good business practice. I get to find out what's happening in my business, I've got happier staff and we can deal with issues before they get out of hand.

► **What do crew members think of the Forum?**



Journee Houston, Crew member, FPS, Ngāti Kuri, Ngāti Whātua

"One of the best things about it is that we are able to speak our minds and get our ideas out there and deal with any issues we might be having. Sometimes people are too shy to talk to their supervisor about a problem. But you can bring it to this Forum. We also talk about incidents and how to prevent them happening again, and come up with solutions for doing that."



Sharif Mangu, Crew Leader, FPS, Ngāti Hine

"I'd recommend being involved in a group like this because it really helps for the day-to-day safety of yourself and your peers in the forest. For example, we had a chainsaw incident where someone got cut and when we talked about it on the radio everyone jumped on and began talking, and the comms got a bit hectic. So, we had a meeting about it and came up with some new protocols, so the comms wouldn't be so heavy. The next time we had an incident everything went much smoother with the comms."

What the law says

The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 says businesses must give workers opportunities to be involved in health and safety. This includes:

- » **Engagement** – Workers must be involved in health and safety issues and decisions, given time to think and talk about concerns, have their views considered, and get feedback on outcomes.
- » **Participation** – Businesses must give workers reasonable opportunities to participate in improving health and safety.
- » **Representation** – As a high-risk industry, forestry businesses must hold elections for health and safety representatives and/or set up a Health and Safety Committee, if asked to by workers.



See more at: safetree.nz/resources/worker-engagement

