Safety Competencies

Introduction to Safety Competencies
Continuing Care Safety
Association

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Vision
Incident free workplaces.

Mission
To create safe workplaces through the provision of education, leadership & collaboration.

Values
- Value safe work, and safe work behaviors.
- Value the right of each worker to have a safe, healthy and incident free work environment.
- Value members’ input, feedback and direction.

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Safety Competencies

With heightened awareness placed on safety and legislative occupational health and safety, employers are not only requiring staff to complete their job tasks, but they have to do so while fulfilling many safety requirements. Employees must not only complete their job tasks independently to a standard level of quality, they must also do so in a safe and timely manner.

Employers from all industries strive to have the most competent employees providing the highest levels of service and safety on their staff. Using competency tools can assist employers in ensuring staff does have the proper knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours for optimal job performance, and provide them with a level of confidence that their staff is going to be able to successfully complete all aspects of their jobs while not sacrificing the quality of service or safety.

The use of competencies is not new to industry, including the health care field. Many jobs in health care require annual competency checks to verify that staff are maintaining skills to acceptable established levels such as in CPR, First Aid certification or mandatory nursing training updates. However, measuring what it means to be safe can be challenging.

Typical competencies contain some safety elements, but it is not the main focus. The CCSA Safety Competency Framework outlines detailed, safety centred observable knowledge, skills and attitudes which will allow employers to promote, evaluate and drive competencies specifically related to safety. This will afford employers greater confidence that their staff will be successful in completing all aspects of their jobs without sacrificing quality of service or safety.

Why Use Competencies?

Employers can implement competency use in many situations. Employers can use competencies during the pre-hire process in the recruitment, assessment and selection processes. Competencies can also be incorporated in the current organizational structure through performance management systems and the development of training programs.

Using competencies, whether they are skill-based or safety-based, has benefits for both the employer and employee.

Using competencies can have many benefits for employers including the potential of many financial gains. Since competencies and specifically safety competencies increase the overall protection and safety of staff and work environment, many financial benefits can be had, including:

- Potential reduction in workers’ premiums and penalties
- Effective and productive on the job training
- Increased reliability of facility operations, quality of work and service
- Increased potential for lowered staff turnover due to job satisfaction
Along with these financial benefits employers can see increased workplace morale and staff benefits. Many of these lead to financial benefits since they increase the productivity and efficiency of the workplace. The workplace benefits can include the following:

- Employees achieving a high level of competence quickly and efficiently
- Employees acquiring the ability to make effective decisions in response to sudden changes in the work environment outside of their normal everyday roles, such as responding to a fire
- Increased staff independence due to an increase in knowledge and skills
- Improved communication and working relationships in the work environment

In addition, this framework provides strong foundational information for HR professionals to assist in implementing staff development programs such as:

- Documentation of employees’ acquisition of knowledge, safety requirements and procedures relating to tasks
- A positive feedback mechanism about an employee’s training achievements and on the job performance
- Providing job standards for performance appraisals
- Providing a method for evaluating career advancement potential

Often competencies can be viewed by employees as strictly part of an evaluative process and staff may be unable to see the many benefits that the use of competencies can hold for them. Competency benefits for employees include:

- A safer work place
- A systematic and flexible method for acquiring and recognizing new skills and knowledge
- Increased confidence for both the employee and supervisor since the training system ensures adequate training is provided before an employee assumes responsibilities
- Accurate documentation of all acquired skills and knowledge including safety training
- Increased potential for job satisfaction

(Benefits of Competency-based Training)

**Safety Competency Framework**

The Safety Competency Framework has been developed so that employers have an in-depth and comprehensive guide to evaluate an employee’s safety. The CCSA has created the framework to identify 6 key elements essential to safety. The 6 elements do not work in isolation of each other but work in community providing a continuity of themes amongst all elements. The 6 key elements are as follows (click on each element title to view element definition and description):

1) [Contributing to a Culture of Safety](#)
2) [Working as a Team for Safety](#)
3) Communicating Effectively for Safety
4) Managing Safety Risks
5) Optimizing Human and Environmental Factors
6) Recognizing, Responding to and Reporting Incidents

The CCSA continues the framework discussion in their Safety Competency Framework Workshop by identifying key knowledge skills and demonstrable attitudes within the elements that can help assist employers identify staff that exemplify a safety mindset with safety competencies.

Why Implement the Safety Competency Framework?
Implementing the Safety Competency Framework can benefit an organization in several ways. For an organization that has an existing safety program, implementing the Safety Competency Framework allows the organization to add a specific safety performance evaluation method to their program allowing them to assess the safety program’s effectiveness. For an organization without a safety program, the framework provides the organization with an effective method to gauge employee knowledge and performance while also establishing the foundation for further development of a safety training program and continued educational plans. Since specific observable behaviors are outlined in the Safety Competency Framework, it may be easier for staff to clearly understand what safety behaviors look like, and therefore easier for staff to emulate.

Implementing the Safety Competency Framework is a proactive way for employers to positively impact their injury prevention potential. The framework clearly outlines the safety behaviors and actions to allow workers to complete their tasks, while minimizing the risk of incidents. The structure and use of the safety competency framework illustrates an organizational commitment to an environment of safety as well as better equips organizations in addressing and investigating incidents. Furthermore, utilization of the framework allows organizations to adhere to safety legislative requirements and thus demonstrates due diligence.

For those organizations that have obtained or are thinking about obtaining their Certificate of Recognition (COR), utilizing the Safety Competency Framework provides supporting documentation with regards to illustrating compliance for many of the COR elements. Aspects of all 8 COR elements can be supported by using the framework. In particular, the Safety Framework provides documented support for COR Elements 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 8.
Works Cited


Appendix – Element Descriptions

Element 1: Contributing to a Culture of Safety

Definition

A commitment to apply core safety knowledge, skills and attitudes to everyday work

Description

A culture of safety comes from attitudes, activities and enduring ethical values that are conducive to the safe delivery of services. An organization’s commitment to the recognition and minimization of safety risks, promotion of staff well-being, increased safety awareness and the focus on learning from near misses and other incidents, through, for example a Health and Safety Policy, is key to a culture of safety. Having a positive attitude towards safety, placing priority on compliance and the continual improvement of an organization’s safety program are crucial steps in achieving a culture of safety.

For an organization to create and maintain this culture of safety, two interdependent factors must be in place. First, an organizational structure that enables and encourages a culture of safety is necessary. Organizations can encourage and enable a culture of safety by providing training opportunities and time for staff to participate in safety actions such as safety talks, inspections or incident investigations. Then, staff and management within that structure must recognize that safety risks are a continuous presence in the workplace, and they must possess the knowledge, skills and tools required through learning opportunities to ensure they are able to actively participate in the organization’s safety program.

In order to contribute to a culture of safety, organizations must be willing to promote and encourage the continuous improvement of the knowledge and skills needed by their staff to attain their desired safety goals through the creation of multiple learning opportunities. In this service industry, it must be recognized that staff and resident safety go hand-in-hand, and that prioritizing safety enhances service to the residents in care and to their families. This requires that all parties acknowledge their role in the safe delivery of services.

Such a culture is an integral component of the ongoing improvement and enhancement of the quality, sustainability and reliability of service delivery in the health care industry.
Element 2: Working as a Team for Safety

Definition
Working as a team to optimize safety

Description
Teams that achieve a high level of safety performance are comprised of team members who are able to demonstrate the attitudes, knowledge and skills that are essential for effective safety collaboration. Teams can be as extensive as an entire organization or as simple as a few members working together to complete a small task. Whatever the team, they must be committed to shared safety goals and outcomes.

In an effective team environment, roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined and each of the team members has a good understanding of their role and how they fit within the team structure. Individuals are aware of their responsibilities and an accountability structure is in place to safeguard responsibility fulfillment.

Teamwork is recognized and there is an understanding within the team that to achieve and maintain a high safety performance, members of the team must work together rather than in isolation. So, in the 24 hour operation of a care facility, teams working day, evening and night shifts all work together to get all aspects of care accomplished rather than divide tasks up for certain teams. This process emphasizes the importance of an environment of collaboration and cooperation.

Element 3: Communicating Effectively for Safety

Definition
Promoting safety through effective communication

Description
To achieve an optimal level of safety, effective communication is required as poor communication can potentially lead to exposing individuals to harm. A high quality and safe working environment is dependent upon the ability of staff members to communicate well with one another; therefore reinforcing personal accountability for the use of effective communication is required. Consideration and acknowledgement about the impact and influence that persons of varying backgrounds have with regard to communication must also be taken in to account; it may be more commonplace for some individuals to bring forward or escalate concerns than it is
for others. Effective communication is dynamic and ongoing, and includes follow-up to verify receipt and comprehension of the message. The process by which staff members convey and receive information is essential for fostering positive interpersonal relationships within the work environment, ensuring safety and preventing of incidents.

Safety communications fall into two categories: preventing incidents and responding to incidents. An organization focused on safety will ensure that a strategic communication plan addressing both incident prevention and responses to incidents is in place. The communication plan should identify effective written and electronic communications, as well as verbal and non-verbal systems. In addition, signage and other communication methods should be simple, clear and concise.

**Element 4: Managing Safety Risks**

**Definition**

*Anticipating, recognizing and managing situations that place individuals at risk*

**Description**

Like many other industries, such as oil and gas, health care can involve high many risk situations, and it must be recognized that things can and will go wrong. Awareness of the element of risk is imperative and special consideration into work system design and training programs must be given so that staff are prepared and can effectively manage risks.

The health care industry is an ever-changing environment, influenced by multiple factors both internal (workplace design and residents) and external (families and funding sources). Task management, teamwork and informed decision-making based on situational awareness are competencies that must be present in order for staff to successfully identify and manage risk in dynamic or volatile situations. Developing and implementing these skills and competencies can positively impact the safety outcomes within facilities.

In addition, health care organizations must be prepared to address the industry tolerance and acceptance of risk as part of the job. The notion that staff safety is negotiable as a price to deliver service must be eliminated. Staff safety is conducive to a higher level of service, rather than an obstacle.
Safety knowledge, safe work practices and problem solving skills must be in place in order to maximize opportunities for risk management. A formal training program should be implemented to further develop safety skills and competencies rather than relying on the transfer of knowledge through an informal mentoring mechanism so that the quality and completeness of information and understanding is ensured.

Element 5: Optimizing Human and Environmental Factors

Definition
Managing the relationship between individual and environmental characteristics to optimize safety

Description
A key safety competency is the ability to recognize and optimize the human and environmental factors that enable and support the best human performance. Decision-making processes are complex, and an understanding of the role played by human and environmental factors is crucial in order to recognize and react to potential problems, as well as to ensure optimal decision-making.

In order to optimize safety, staff must know how their own performance and the performance of others, within a specific environment, combine to influence the ability to manage safety. The interactions between staff, as well as the dynamics of the environment, are major factors in potential safety outcomes.

Human factors such as individual’s knowledge, skill, experience, risk tolerance and attitudes influence individual safety performance. In addition, personal biases, staff health, work-life balance and fatigue levels, which are at times overlooked, all play a critical role in performance and thus safety outcomes.

Environmental factors such as policies, procedures, systems, resources, technology use, as well as the organizational culture and structure all impact safety. In health care organizations, unique environmental factors such as the individual behaviours and health of the residents, the allowances made to ensure a homelike environment, facility design, material availability and staffing levels will have a great impact on decision-making and, ultimately, on safety performance.
The relationships between staff, facility residents and the nature of the environment and its technology, all have a significant effect on the capacity to deliver safe work practices.

**Element 6: Recognizing, Responding to and Reporting Incidents**

**Definition**

*Recognizing the occurrence of an incident or near miss, responding effectively to mitigate harm to individuals, ensuring proper reporting and preventing recurrence*

**Description**

To ensure a safe environment, staff must possess the knowledge and judgment to appropriately recognize and respond to incidents in a timely matter so as to prevent further harm. Staff must also be aware that reporting the facts of an incident or near miss to all proper individuals, such as supervisors, directors, occupational health and safety personnel, must occur as soon as appropriate. It should be acknowledged that members of the staff may need support in responding to an incident.

With any incident or near miss there is a human element or impact. It must be understood that all individuals involved (staff and witness) may be impacted by the incident. Therefore, full, honest communication of the incident and results of the investigation, including how future incidents will be prevented must be communicated to all affected by the incident. Staff members’ abilities to continue to provide services after an incident may be compromised. Therefore, all facility staff should be aware of this possibility and be willing and able to recognize and provide necessary support. This may include being able to draw on an organization’s structured support systems or community support systems. Finally, an honest attitude to the reporting and investigation of incidents and near misses is an important element of a culture of safety, providing organizations an opportunity to identify and analyze system failures to develop preventative solutions.

The reporting of incidents and near misses is treated as a priority, and there is an understanding amongst staff that their organization is committed to the timely review and response, including corrective actions, of incidents and near misses while meeting the required legislative responsibilities. Reviews that identify the underlying root causes (i.e. breakdown in the communication process or missing policy component) and therefore result in the implementation of appropriate corrective actions to prevent similar occurrences need to occur. Incidents and
near misses need not be a source of punitive actions but rather considered and treated as learning opportunities to reduce system failures and improve staff performance. In addition, incidents should be recognized as opportunity for organizational growth and development, with an understanding that all incidents can be prevented.