

Take the initiative. Lord of the Risk.

How information technology can be applied to make company owners and directors “lords” of health and safety risk.

A Scary Story

A collective shudder went through New Zealand company owners and directors when fabled filmmaker Peter Jackson resigned from governance position of Weta Workshop in February 2016. A spokesman for the company confirmed Jackson was stepping down because he was concerned about exposure under New Zealand’s new Health and Safety at Work Act, effective April 2016.

Whether or not Jackson needed to step away from the directorship has been hotly debated, but what is not is the increased nervousness amongst directors about their responsibility for the safety of staff employed by the entities they guide.

In simple terms directors under the new legislation need to be aware of the health and safety issues inherent in the business, ensure a plan is in place to manage these risks and most importantly ensure it is executed.



According to research by the New Zealand Institute of Directors, published in February, over a quarter of directors said that because of concerns about increased accountability for health and safety under the new law, their organisation was reviewing its risk more actively.

Owners and directors' nervousness comes not so much from being aware of health and safety issues (many already are well informed), or having policies in place, but crucially ensuring something is being done about it.

Technology plays a key role in achieving this for any organisation of reasonable size. It can increase visibility to issues and what is being done, improve the efficiency of processes, and above all drive activity to ensure results are achieved.

Health and Safety Software: The Basics

Numerous software products for managing health and safety are available on the New Zealand market, from the very simple to vast enterprise systems. As an owner or director you want the comfort that whatever system you have, it can do the basics:

- Provide a single repository for health and safety information, such as objectives, policies and procedures (including those required to be compliance with ACC Workplace Safety Management Practices).
- The management of health and safety auditing processes.
- Being able to manage the risk from bringing contractors in, especially their qualifications and competencies for allocated tasks.
- Reporting of safety incidents and the subsequent efforts at reviewing and improving processes.
- Undertaking regular workplace reviews to identify hazards, emergency management and policies and procedures of a workplace.
- Provide an easy way for staff to be proactive in health and safety in the workplace, by providing process to identify and manage risks, hazards and other safety issues.

Any reasonable health and safety system will enable your business to manage these aspects of risk. The bigger question is how can you get confidence, from a governance perspective, that your systems aren't simply watching what is happening, but are helping facilitate the crucial act of doing something about it.

The Special Effects

To become a 'Lord of the Risk', directors want to ensure the software applied to managing health and safety actually supports real change. Traditional players in this market didn't build their products for the new era, so may not offer the required functionality.

As a newer entrant into the health and software sector, Assura has developed technology purpose-built for this more pro-active way of managing health and safety. That means offering all of the functionality outlined in the previous section, but also focussing on two other critical success factors under this new legislation: being easy and being active.

Being Easy

Health and safety systems have traditionally been back room registers of risk and compliance. The important thing was documenting, not necessarily doing. Used and administered by the experts in the area, and visible to others only through reports.

The modern approach is to make these systems as widely available as possible, visible to managers and directors to monitor, and easy for workers throughout a business to access and record incidents.

At Assura this has led to a relentless focus on creating a simple, friendly user interface. The system has to be intuitive for everyone, from shop floor staff to directors. The front end has to be simple for anyone in an organisation to fill in anything from an incident report to a safety observation.

Part of this simplicity is also ensuring companies aren't left with a big training burden from their health and safety systems. And that migrating existing information into a new system is streamlined.

A premium has to be put on providing mobile access to systems. Health and safety issues can emerge virtually anywhere in a business, so access to the system to manage these issues also needs to be widely available.

Being Active

Assura's heritage is building systems powered by workflow i.e. where users of the software are guided through steps of defined processes to achieve a specific outcome. Applying workflow to health and safety management transforms it from a passive incident-recording approach, to a method for ensuring risks are identified and steps are taken to address these.

'Workflow' may typically be a boring software term, but in this new era of health and safety it has come alive. Above all, directors should insist their health and safety software contains workflows that ensure processes are managed and completed, so the businesses can be active about managing health and safety issues.

The process of building workflows themselves can help improve existing health and safety processes. And because the management of these tasks is proscribed, the quality of the outcome is more consistent and more efficiently completed.

Workflow ensures the right people are assigned to the right tasks, increasing the likelihood of getting a positive result, and freeing management to focus on strategy not operations.

Visibility is the other crucial aspect of having workflow built into your health and safety system. Processes are visible to appropriate system users, enabling bottlenecks to be identified and addressed, and accountability for delays to be very clear. And you retain an audit of all activity to review what actions have been taken.

The Final Scene

Being an owner or director in this new era of health and safety can be frightening, as Peter Jackson's movie indicates. For example a typical manufacturing business, literally hundreds of incidents and or identified hazards could be recorded every day, which ultimately require recording and processes to be put in place to address them.

Technology is key to director's fulfilling their obligations to health and safety. That confidence will come from ensuring the right type of tools are employed - those that are straightforward and can deliver real change.

About Assura?

Assura is an intuitive health & safety management software system. It helps you do more than simply meet your compliance responsibilities. If something is not right, Assura's automated workflow processes will help you to identify it, and put a process in place to resolve it.

Take the initiative, go beyond the expected and save time and money through streamlining processes.