

Risk Management in Practice

Lecture 11: Communicating and Presenting Risk (Ensuring, Understanding and Effective Action)

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Undergraduate Diploma in
Occupational Health and Safety

Lecture Overview

This lesson focuses on effective risk communication to support informed decision-making across organisations. Students will explore how risk assessments, controls, and mitigation strategies can be clearly documented and presented to diverse stakeholder groups. Emphasis is placed on stakeholder management, including identifying stakeholder needs, expectations, and levels of risk awareness, to tailor communication appropriately. The lesson introduces key risk communication tools such as reports, dashboards, and heat maps, highlighting how visual formats can simplify complex risk data. Students will learn techniques to adapt messages for non-technical audiences, ensuring clarity, relevance, and transparency. By completing this lesson, students will develop the ability to prepare professional risk communication documents, translate technical information into accessible messages, and confidently present risk strategies. These skills enhance decision-making, support governance processes, and foster a strong risk-aware culture within organisations.



What is Risk Communication?

Risk communication is the process of conveying risk-related information to stakeholders, ensuring they understand potential threats, uncertainties, and their implications. It involves sharing findings from risk assessments, controls, and mitigation strategies. Effective risk communication enables stakeholders to make informed decisions and take appropriate actions to manage and respond to risks.

Clarity, accuracy, and relevance are essential in risk communication. Messages should be simple, precise, and tailored to the audience's level of understanding. Avoiding jargon, providing concrete examples, and focusing on the most critical risks ensures stakeholders can quickly grasp key points and respond appropriately to the information presented.

Good risk communication helps prevent misunderstandings and misinterpretation of risk data. By presenting information transparently and consistently, organisations can support better decision-making, strengthen trust among stakeholders, and foster a risk-aware culture. Clear communication ensures risks are managed proactively rather than reactively, reducing surprises and enhancing organisational resilience.



Why Risk Communication Matters ?

Effective risk communication is a cornerstone of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) because it ensures that all employees, management, and stakeholders understand the hazards and potential risks present in the workplace. OHS risks can range from physical injuries, chemical exposures, ergonomic issues, or psychological hazards. Communicating these risks clearly allows individuals to recognise dangers, follow safe procedures, and take preventive actions, reducing workplace incidents and protecting health.

Clarity, accuracy, and relevance are critical in OHS communication. Technical safety data, such as exposure limits, safety protocols, or emergency procedures, must be presented in a way that all staff can understand, regardless of their technical expertise. Miscommunication or overly complex messaging can lead to non-compliance, unsafe practices, or misunderstandings that compromise safety. Risk communication ensures everyone has the information needed to act responsibly and make informed safety decisions.

Additionally, effective risk communication in OHS supports legal compliance, regulatory reporting, and organisational accountability. It fosters a culture of safety, where employees feel informed, empowered, and responsible for minimizing risks. Transparent communication also builds trust between workers and management, encouraging reporting of near misses, hazards, or unsafe practices. Ultimately, OHS risk communication not only reduces injuries and incidents but also enhances operational efficiency, employee morale, and organisational resilience.



Types of Organisational Risks?

Organisations face various types of risks, including strategic risks such as poor business decisions, operational risks like process failures, OHS risks involving workplace safety hazards, financial risks such as budget shortfalls or market volatility, and compliance risks related to breaches of laws or regulations. Each risk type can impact the organisation differently and requires timely attention.

Each type of risk often demands a different communication approach. Strategic and financial risks may require high-level summaries for executives, while OHS risks need clear, actionable instructions for staff. Operational risks may involve process-specific guidance, and compliance risks require transparent reporting to regulators. Tailoring communication ensures stakeholders understand, respond appropriately, and make informed decisions.



Risk Assessment

Risk assessments in OHS are systematic processes used to identify, evaluate, and prioritise potential hazards in the workplace. They involve examining work environments, tasks, equipment, and practices to determine what could cause harm, who might be affected, and the likelihood and severity of such risks. Methods may include site inspections, incident reports, employee consultations, and reviewing safety data sheets.

Once hazards are identified, the next step is to analyse and document the findings clearly. Documentation should include the nature of each hazard, its potential impact on workers, current control measures, and recommendations for mitigation. Clear documentation ensures that stakeholders, including management, safety committees, and employees, understand the risks and the actions required to manage them effectively. It also serves as a record for accountability and regulatory compliance.

Risk assessments form the foundation of all subsequent OHS risk communication. The assessment results guide safety training, development of standard operating procedures, signage, and emergency planning. Without a comprehensive assessment, communication may be incomplete or inaccurate, leaving workers unprepared and organisations exposed to preventable incidents. In essence, thorough risk assessments enable informed decision-making and a proactive, risk-aware workplace culture.



Risk Controls

Risk controls in Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) are specific actions, measures, or processes implemented to either prevent hazards from causing harm or detect risks before they result in incidents. Examples include safety training, machine guards, personal protective equipment (PPE), emergency procedures, and monitoring systems. Effective risk controls are essential for reducing workplace injuries, illnesses, and operational disruptions.

Risk controls can be classified as preventive or detective. Preventive controls are designed to stop a hazard from occurring, such as safety barriers, proper ergonomics, or employee training programs. Detective controls identify hazards that have already occurred or are imminent, such as safety inspections, alarms, incident reporting systems, and workplace monitoring. Both types work together to maintain a safe work environment.

It is critical to communicate which controls are in place and their effectiveness to all stakeholders. Workers need to understand how to apply controls in practice, managers must know the status of implementation, and regulators require evidence of compliance. Transparent communication ensures confidence in safety measures, identifies gaps for improvement, and fosters a proactive, risk-aware culture in the organisation.



Risk Mitigation Strategies

In Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), risk mitigation strategies are measures implemented to manage workplace hazards and reduce the likelihood or impact of incidents. The four main strategies are AVOID, REDUCE, TRANSFER, and ACCEPT.

Avoidance eliminates the hazard entirely, for example, by redesigning a process to remove exposure to dangerous chemicals. Reduction minimizes risk through measures such as installing safety guards, providing PPE, or implementing training programs.

Transfer involves shifting risk responsibility, such as using contractors with specialized safety expertise or purchasing insurance to cover potential claims.

Acceptance is acknowledging a risk that cannot be eliminated or reduced cost-effectively, while ensuring monitoring and emergency procedures are in place. Even accepted risks require awareness and contingency planning to protect employees and the organisation.

Clarity in mitigation plans is critical for stakeholders to make informed decisions. Workers need to understand how to follow safety measures, managers need to allocate resources effectively, and regulators need assurance that risks are controlled. Transparent communication of mitigation strategies builds trust, ensures accountability, and supports a proactive safety culture, enabling organisations to manage risks while maintaining operational efficiency.



Documenting Risk Information

Clarity, Consistency & Accuracy

Documenting occupational health and safety risk information requires clarity, consistency, and accuracy to ensure hazards are properly understood and controlled. Clear language reduces misinterpretation, consistent formats support comparison, and accurate details reflect real conditions. Together, these qualities enable workers, supervisors, and regulators to rely on documentation when identifying risks, implementing controls, and reviewing safety performance across all workplace activities effectively.

Transparency & Accountability

Good OHS documentation promotes transparency and accountability by clearly recording decisions, responsibilities, and actions taken to manage risk. Transparent records allow stakeholders to trace how hazards were assessed and controlled, while accountability ensures individuals meet legal and organisational duties. This strengthens compliance, supports audits and investigations, and builds trust in the organisation's safety management system over time and across operations.



Stakeholder Management

Stakeholders are individuals or groups who are affected by risk decisions or who have the ability to influence risk outcomes. In an OHS context, this includes workers, supervisors, management, contractors, regulators, and even the wider community. Each stakeholder may have different levels of interest, responsibility, and understanding of risk, which must be recognised.

Effective stakeholder management is critical to successful risk communication because it ensures the right information reaches the right people at the right time. Engaging stakeholders helps identify hazards more accurately, encourages consultation and cooperation, and improves acceptance of risk controls. Clear communication also reduces misunderstandings, supports compliance, and strengthens shared responsibility for workplace safety.



Identify Stakeholder Responsibilities

In occupational health and safety, stakeholders can be classified as internal or external. Internal stakeholders include workers, supervisors, managers, health and safety representatives, and safety committees, as they are directly involved in daily operations and risk controls. External stakeholders include contractors, suppliers, clients, regulators, emergency services, and the surrounding community, who may be affected by workplace risks or compliance obligations.

Identifying stakeholders allows organisations to understand who needs to be consulted, informed, or involved in risk management. Creating a stakeholder map is an effective tool to prioritise communication efforts by assessing each stakeholder's level of influence and interest in OHS matters. This ensures critical stakeholders receive timely, relevant information and supports effective consultation, cooperation, and coordination of safety responsibilities.



Stakeholder OHS Need & Expectations

In occupational health and safety, different stakeholders require different levels and types of information based on their roles and responsibilities. Workers need clear, practical instructions on hazards and controls, while supervisors and managers require more detailed information to support decision-making and compliance. Regulators expect accurate, formal documentation that demonstrates legal obligations are being met.

Aligning OHS information with stakeholder needs and expectations is essential for effective communication. Information should be relevant, timely, and presented in an appropriate format to avoid confusion or information overload. When expectations are met, stakeholders are more likely to engage with safety processes, follow procedures, and contribute to a positive safety culture.



Risk Awareness Levels

Risk awareness levels vary widely among OHS stakeholders, making it important to assess their knowledge, experience, and risk literacy. New workers, contractors, or visitors may have limited understanding of workplace hazards, while supervisors and safety professionals often have higher levels of risk awareness. Identifying these differences helps determine how much explanation and technical detail is required.

Tailoring OHS messages to match stakeholder risk awareness prevents both information overload and under-informing. Overly complex information can reduce understanding and engagement, while insufficient detail may leave stakeholders unaware of serious hazards. Clear, targeted communication improves comprehension, supports safe decision-making, and encourages consistent application of risk controls across the workplace.



Risk Communication Tools

Risk communication tools are used in occupational health and safety to present risk information clearly and effectively. Common tools include risk reports, which provide detailed written analysis; dashboards, which summarise key safety indicators; and heat maps, which visually display risk levels. Each tool helps stakeholders understand hazards and priorities.

The choice of risk communication tool depends on the audience and the purpose of the message. Senior management may require HIGH-LEVEL DASHBOARDS, while supervisors and safety personnel may need detailed RISK REPORTS or HEAT MAPS. Selecting the right tool ensures information is understood, supports decision-making, and improves OHS risk management outcomes.



Risk Report

Risk reports in occupational health and safety are formal documents used to communicate identified hazards, assessed risks, and recommended controls. They are usually structured with an executive summary, a detailed risk assessment, and mitigation strategies. The executive summary provides a clear overview of key risks and priorities, while the risk assessment section outlines hazard identification, likelihood, consequences, and existing controls. The mitigation section details recommended actions, responsible persons, and timeframes.

Clarity and relevance are essential so decision-makers can act effectively. Reports should focus on significant OHS risks, avoid unnecessary technical language, and link findings directly to legal and organisational requirements. For example, a risk report on manual handling may summarise high injury rates in the executive summary, assess lifting tasks in detail, and recommend controls such as mechanical aids, training, and revised work procedures



Risk Report (Example)

GROUP RISK REPORTING TEMPLATE

Detailed risk description	
Key consequences	
Trend	

New mitigation initiatives (approved)					
No.	Mitigation initiatives	Est. Cost	Action owner	Due date	Status
1					
2					
3					
4					

<p>Impact</p> <p>Likelihood</p> <p>○ = Residual 2010 ● = Residual ○ = Inherent</p>									
Estimated financial impact <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Inherent</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Residual</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other key impacts</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Inherent		Residual		Other key impacts				
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Risk owner:									
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Version:									
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Dashboards (Example)

In occupational health and safety, dashboards are visual, real-time tools that display key risk information at a glance. They allow organisations to monitor OHS performance, track compliance, and identify emerging hazards quickly. Dashboards typically include metrics such as incident rates, near misses, training completion, audit outcomes, and corrective actions.

Dashboards are particularly valuable for tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) and identifying trends over time. For example, a dashboard might show that slip-and-fall incidents have increased in a particular area, prompting targeted inspections, additional signage, or staff training. By presenting data visually, dashboards support timely decision-making, improve transparency, and keep management and workers informed about ongoing safety performance.



Dashboards

RISK DASHBOARD

Project Portfolio Dashboard

Project Delivery Roadmap			Project Health Card	Sch	Bud	Res	Risk	CDA
	Project Beta		Project Beta	●	●	●	●	●
			TATA Implementation	●	●	●	●	●
			Project Gamma	●	●	●	●	●
			Test Automation	●	●	●	●	●
			SPAX	●	●	●	●	●

Projects Funding



Resource Allocation (Headcount)



Portfolio Risks



Risk Heat Maps

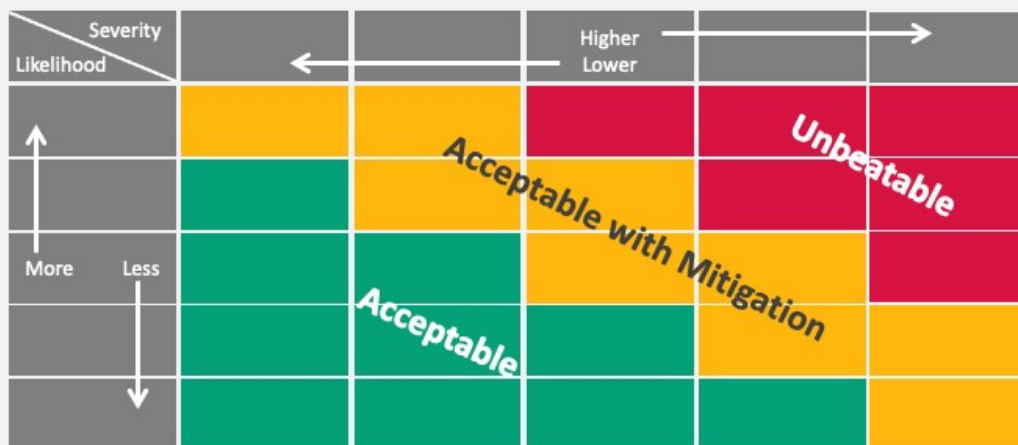
In occupational health and safety, risk heat maps are visual tools that display risks according to their likelihood and potential impact. Each hazard is represented on a grid, with colours indicating severity—often green for low risk, yellow for moderate, and red for high. This allows teams to prioritise which risks need immediate attention and which require monitoring.

Heat maps are particularly useful because they make complex risk information accessible to non-technical stakeholders. For example, a heat map could show that chemical exposure in a lab is high likelihood and high impact (red zone), while minor ergonomic risks are lower (yellow or green). Visual representation helps workers, supervisors, and management quickly understand priorities, focus resources effectively, and support proactive OHS decision-making.



Risk Heat Maps Example

RISK HEAT MAP



Using Visual Formats Effectively

In occupational health and safety, visual formats such as charts, graphs, and infographics can make risk information easier to understand. Best practices include keeping visuals simple, using clear labels, and highlighting key insights—such as trends in incidents, high-risk areas, or compliance gaps. Simple bar charts or line graphs can show changes in injury rates over time, while pie charts can illustrate proportions of different hazard types.

It is important to avoid cluttering visuals with unnecessary data, as too much information can confuse stakeholders or obscure critical risks. For example, a heat map displaying only the most significant hazards is more effective than including minor risks that dilute focus. Similarly, using colour coding to highlight high-risk areas in a dashboard or incident trend graph helps management and workers quickly identify priorities and take action. Clear, targeted visuals improve engagement, comprehension, and decision-making in OHS risk management.



Communicating with Non-Technical Audience

In occupational health and safety, many stakeholders—including workers, contractors, and community members—may not have technical knowledge of risk assessment methods or safety regulations. When communicating with these audiences, it is essential to use plain, simple language and avoid technical jargon, acronyms, or overly complex explanations. Clear, everyday terms help ensure everyone understands the risks and their role in managing them.

Equally important is emphasising relevance—explaining how hazards and controls directly affect the stakeholder. For example, instead of stating “exposure to airborne particulates exceeds permissible exposure limits,” say “dust in this area could cause breathing problems if proper protective equipment is not used.” Linking risks to practical consequences and actions improves comprehension, engagement, and compliance, fostering a culture where safety is everyone’s responsibility.



Adapt Communication Styles

In occupational health and safety (OHS), effectively conveying risk information requires carefully adapting communication styles to the knowledge, responsibilities, and specific needs of each audience. Different stakeholders, including frontline workers, supervisors, management, contractors, and the wider community, perceive and act on safety information in unique ways. Frontline workers may need practical, step-by-step guidance, while managers require high-level summaries and trend analyses to make strategic decisions. Regulators and external stakeholders focus on compliance and accountability. Failing to tailor communication can result in confusion, overlooked hazards, unsafe practices, or regulatory breaches. Clear, audience-specific communication ensures understanding, engagement, and proactive safety behaviours.



Adapt Communication Styles

Frontline Workers

- **Style:** Simple, clear, and practical. Use plain language, visual aids, demonstrations, and examples.
- **Focus:** Immediate hazards, safe work practices, and required controls.
- **Methods:** Toolbox talks, signage, posters, short training sessions, and safety briefings.
- **Example:** Show workers how to properly lift heavy objects rather than providing complex risk assessment tables.



Adapt Communication Styles

Supervisors and Team Leaders

- **Style:** Detailed, structured, and actionable. Include procedures, compliance requirements, and trend data.
- **Focus:** Monitoring, enforcement, and coaching workers on safe practices.
- **Methods:** Detailed reports, safety checklists, dashboards, and in-person briefings.
- **Example:** Use a dashboard showing near-miss trends in their area, highlighting tasks requiring attention.



Adapt Communication Styles

Management and Executives

- **Style:** High-level, concise, and outcome-focused. Emphasize strategic implications, KPIs, and legal compliance.
- **Focus:** Resource allocation, risk prioritization, and organisational safety performance.
- **Methods:** Executive summaries, dashboards, heat maps, and formal reports.
- **Example:** Present a heat map of top five high-risk activities with proposed mitigation strategies and costs.



Adapt Communication Styles

External Stakeholders (Contractors, Regulators, Community)

- **Style:** Formal, clear, and transparent. Focus on accountability, compliance, and impact.
- **Focus:** Regulatory adherence, contractual obligations, and community safety.
- **Methods:** Reports, meetings, public notices, and training sessions where needed.
- **Example:** Provide contractors with a risk briefing before starting work, emphasizing their responsibilities for PPE and hazard reporting.



Adapt Communication Styles

Mixed Audiences

- **Style:** Layered communication works best—start with key messages in simple language, then provide optional detailed data for those who need it.
- **Focus:** Ensure everyone receives essential information while specialists' access technical details.
- **Methods:** Infographics with footnotes, dashboards with drill-down capability, and hybrid training sessions.



Adapt Communication Styles

Match language, depth, and format to audience knowledge - Tailor communication to the audience's expertise. Use simple, practical language for frontline workers, structured technical details for supervisors, and high-level summaries for management to ensure messages are understood and actionable.

Use visuals to simplify complex risks for non-technical stakeholders - Charts, heat maps, infographics, and dashboards help translate technical risk data into intuitive formats. Visual tools make hazard likelihood, severity, and priorities clear, improving comprehension and engagement for non-technical audiences.

Prioritize relevance, show how risks directly affect them - Focus on risks that impact the audience's role or responsibilities. Explain practical consequences of hazards, linking them to everyday tasks, safety procedures, and personal accountability to drive awareness and compliance.

Encourage feedback to ensure understanding and engagement - Create opportunities for questions, discussions, and reporting misunderstandings. Feedback confirms comprehension, uncovers overlooked hazards, and fosters a participative safety culture where stakeholders actively contribute to risk management.



Promote Transparency & Trust

In occupational health and safety, transparency and trust are essential for effective risk management. Honest, consistent communication ensures stakeholders - including workers, supervisors, management, contractors, and regulators - understand hazards, controls, and organisational decisions. Providing clear, accurate information about risks and incidents demonstrates accountability and fosters confidence in safety processes.

A lack of transparency can quickly erode trust. For example, if a near-miss incident is downplayed or safety data is withheld, workers may ignore procedures, assume risks are insignificant, or stop reporting hazards. Similarly, management credibility can suffer if promised safety improvements are delayed or poorly communicated. Consistent, open communication helps maintain engagement, reinforces a safety culture, and encourages stakeholders to actively participate in OHS initiatives.



Lecture - Key Takeaways

Summarise skills learned

Students have developed skills in preparing professional OHS risk communication documents, presenting information effectively to diverse stakeholders, and influencing decision-making by clearly conveying hazards, controls, and recommendations for safer workplace practices.

Reinforce ability to translate technical risk information

Students can now interpret complex technical risk data and translate it into clear, concise, and actionable messages that are understandable for both technical and non-technical audiences, supporting informed decision-making and proactive safety behaviour.

Encourage application to real-world scenarios

Students are encouraged to apply these communication skills in real workplace scenarios, promoting engagement, improving compliance, and fostering a culture where risk awareness and shared responsibility become integral to daily operations.





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