

# WSH GUIDE TO Behavioural Observation and Intervention



**WSH GUIDE TO**  
**Behavioural Observation and Intervention**

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## Introduction to Behavioural Observation and Intervention



# INTRODUCTION TO BEHAVIOURAL OBSERVATION AND INTERVENTION

Developed by the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Council, Behavioural Observation and Intervention (BO&I) is a simplified behavioural safety initiative a company may adopt to demonstrate care for its workers, instil in them safe work practices, and reduce the incidence of at-risk work behaviours. The BO&I initiative supports WSH culture building efforts and can be used to enhance the "Ownership and Teamwork" attribute of the WSH CultureSAFE Model.

## What is Behavioural Observation and Intervention?

BO&I is a safety initiative developed by the WSH Council. It aims to promote safe work practices and instil a sense of safety ownership in all workers in a company.

## What can Behavioural Observation and Intervention do?

BO&I aims to reduce the incidence of at-risk work behaviours, resulting in fewer WSH incidents and injuries, lower operating costs, greater productivity and improved WSH performance.

## Who is Behavioural Observation and Intervention for?

BO&I is for all companies, including Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), which are keen to explore a behavioural approach to improving WSH performance.



## Why implement Behavioural Observation and Intervention?

Beyond increased productivity and improved WSH performance, BO&I is a significant step to establish a positive WSH culture where employers and employees care for one another, exercise teamwork, and take greater ownership of their actions and those of their colleagues.

Other benefits of implementing BO&I include:

- allowing management to demonstrate commitment to WSH;
- enabling two-way WSH communication between the workforce and management and between employees;
- engaging employees in matters pertaining to WSH;
- empowering employees to act promptly in response to at-risk behaviours; and
- creating greater awareness of the impact of human factors on WSH.

**Where can Behavioural Observation and Intervention work?**

BO&I can be implemented in any industry (from construction, marine and manufacturing to healthcare, retail and almost any office-based work environment) where WSH is of paramount importance and the goal is for every worker to go home to their families safe and injury-free at the end of each day.

**When is the right time for Behavioural Observation and Intervention?**

Companies with safe work procedures (SWPs) and a WSH management system in place will be in a better position to reap the benefits of BO&I.



# The Behavioural Observation and Intervention Approach

# THE BEHAVIOURAL OBSERVATION AND INTERVENTION APPROACH

Though many companies have achieved basic risk management capability and/or put in place a comprehensive WSH management system (WSHMS), near-miss incidents, cases requiring first aid, and workplace accidents leading to fatal or non-fatal (major or minor) injuries still occur. As shown in the injury pyramid (see Figure 1), it is possible for hazardous situations to continue to arise due to WSHMS failures (e.g., poor WSHMS implementation), unsafe workplace conditions (e.g., as a result of incomplete risk assessment) and/or at-risk behaviours. Therefore, there is a need to prevent such hazardous situations from arising before they lead to accidents or injuries.

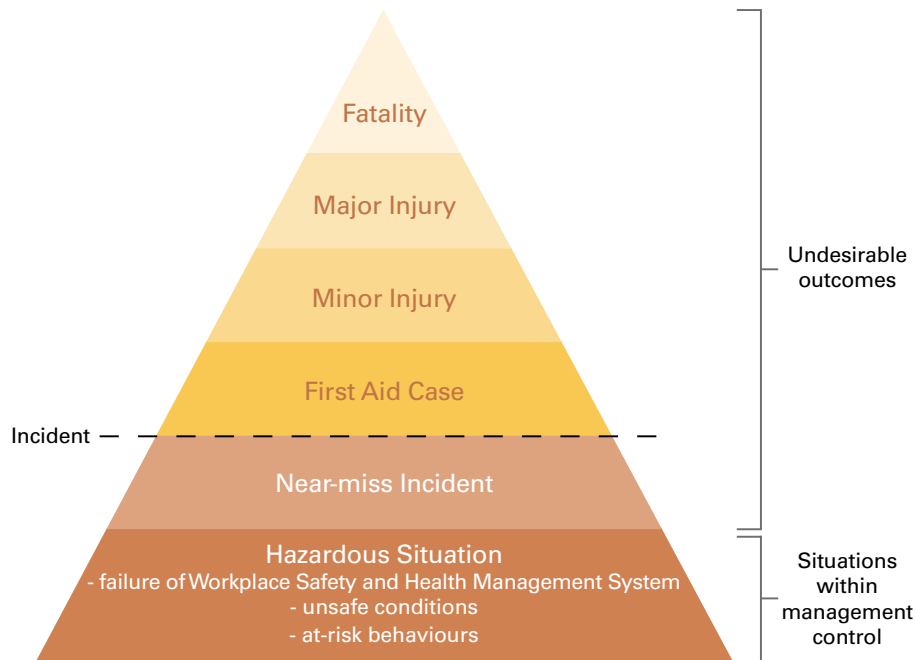


Figure 1: Modified injury pyramid based on Heinrich's Accident Triangle<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Heinrich's Accident Triangle showed that, of 330 workplace accidents, 1 would lead to a major injury, 29 would lead to minor injuries, and 300 would be due to at-risk behaviours.

BO&I serves to help companies minimise the occurrence of hazardous situations by focusing on at-risk behaviours. With an emphasis on personal and team responsibility as well as behavioural safety, embarking on the BO&I initiative is a positive step towards fostering a positive WSH culture in a company.

## Underlying Principles of Behavioural Observation and Intervention

The BO&I initiative operates with the underlying principle of the duty of care. It works towards making safety a habit for all workers, encouraging them to feel a sense of ownership towards the safety of everyone in the company. Ultimately, BO&I enables a company to move towards zero injuries as a safety goal (see Figure 2).

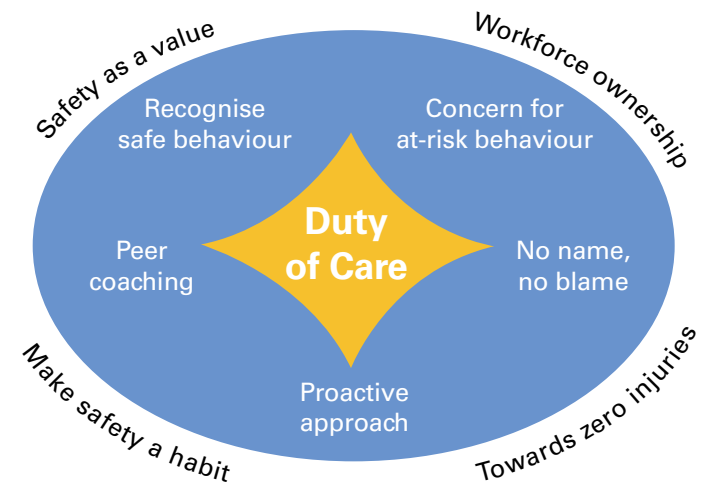


Figure 2: The underlying principles of BO&I.

- **Duty of care**  
It is the responsibility of each employee to look out for and care for one another, regardless of position or seniority. This helps ensure that every worker can go home safely at the end of each day.
- **Recognition of safe behaviour; concern for at-risk behaviours**  
Every employee is to actively look out for their colleagues. If they observe safe behaviours, they should offer positive reinforcement and encouragement (e.g., verbal praise). However, if they observe at-risk work behaviour, they should not hesitate to intervene immediately on-site. They should express concern for their colleague's safety, and offer safer alternatives on how to work.

- **“No name, no blame”**

The aim of BO&I is to reinforce safe behaviours and identify at-risk work behaviours. It is not about finding faults or apportioning blame, hence the “no name, no blame” approach. Any written documentation concerning incident observations and associated findings should not contain the identity of the person being observed. This allows open and uninhibited communication and ensures that the focus of the programme remains on improving WSH.

- **Peer coaching**

The behavioural approach to safety relies largely on on-site observation and feedback. While this can initially be led by managers and supervisors on the ground, the true benefit of BO&I can be realised only when employees take ownership of the initiative, and realise that they can actively participate in WSH through peer coaching.

Peer coaching involves timely and constructive feedback between any two (or more) employees when they observe safe or unsafe workplace behaviour. It is through this enhanced communication that safe behaviours can be recognised and at-risk behaviours addressed in a timely manner, before they lead to undesirable outcomes.

- **Proactive approach**

Instead of taking action only after an accident has occurred, this approach emphasises proactively identifying at-risk behaviours. This means that hazardous situations can be avoided before they occur, leading to a reduction in near-miss incidents and workplace injuries.



- **Safety as a value**

Safety is not just a first priority, as priorities can change according to external factors. It should be a corporate value internalised and actively practiced by each employee. With safety as a core value, employees share the belief that all injuries are preventable and that safety should be embraced as a way of life.

- **Make safety a habit**

Habits are essentially routines of daily behaviour that are repeated regularly and tend to occur subconsciously. Safe habits (e.g., wearing a seat belt before driving a vehicle) can be developed over time, especially with frequent reminders (e.g., through signage and/ or conversations with colleagues) and a workplace culture that stresses the importance of developing safe work habits.

Starting with documented SWPs, necessary training and sufficient practice, a person’s proficiency in carrying out a particular task can be developed to the point where his/ her competence operates at an unconscious level – when safety becomes a habit, leading to the subconscious repetition of safe behaviours at work (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Repeated demonstration of safe behaviours is indicative of a positive WSH culture.

Examples of safe behaviours and/ or desirable safety habits to be cultivated at workplaces include:

- conducting risk assessments or safety scans before starting each job;
- following SWPs without taking shortcuts;
- using the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) properly;
- using the correct tool(s) for the job and in the proper manner;
- responding quickly to emergency warning systems; and
- using a mechanical aid or asking for help when lifting heavy or bulky objects.

■ **Workforce ownership, teamwork and participation**

All members of the organisation should feel a sense of ownership regarding WSH, from the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to the last employee. Ownership of WSH should be pervasive and not solely confined to the WSH department. Every employee needs to understand their role in assuring WSH and how each and every person can participate and contribute both individually and as a team.

■ **Towards zero injuries**

BO&I emphasises people and their role in WSH, as opposed to regulatory compliance or facilities improvement. As shown in Figure 4, it can be seen that a behavioural approach is an important strategy companies may adopt as part of their WSH culture building journey as they strive to improve WSH performance towards the goal of zero injuries.

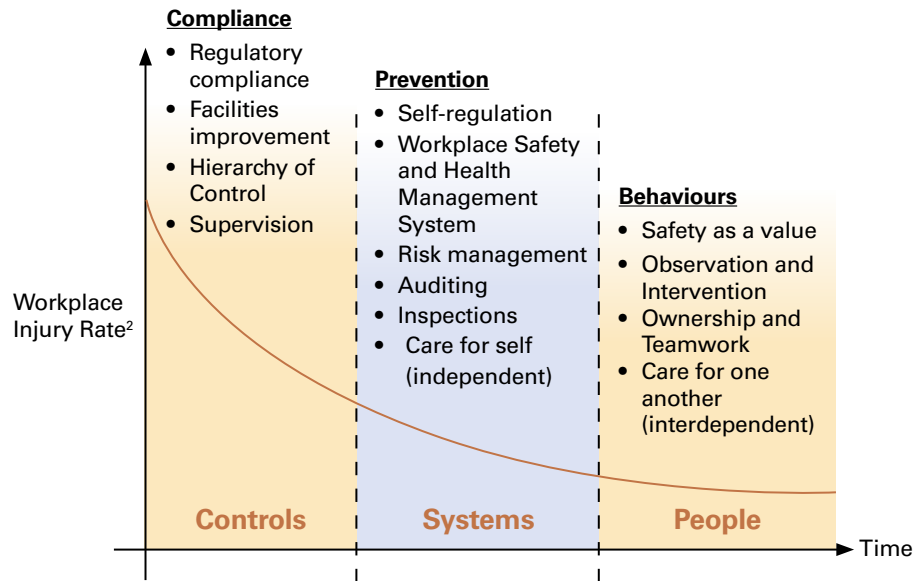


Figure 4: Overview of WSH performance improvement strategies.

<sup>2</sup> The workplace injury rate is defined as the number of workplace injuries per 100,000 persons employed.



# Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing Behavioural Observation and Intervention



# STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTING BEHAVIOURAL OBSERVATION AND INTERVENTION

With its many priorities, the BO&I approach may appear difficult and complicated. However, with work safety as its core value, implementation of the BO&I initiative can be easily broken down into four key steps (see Figure 5).

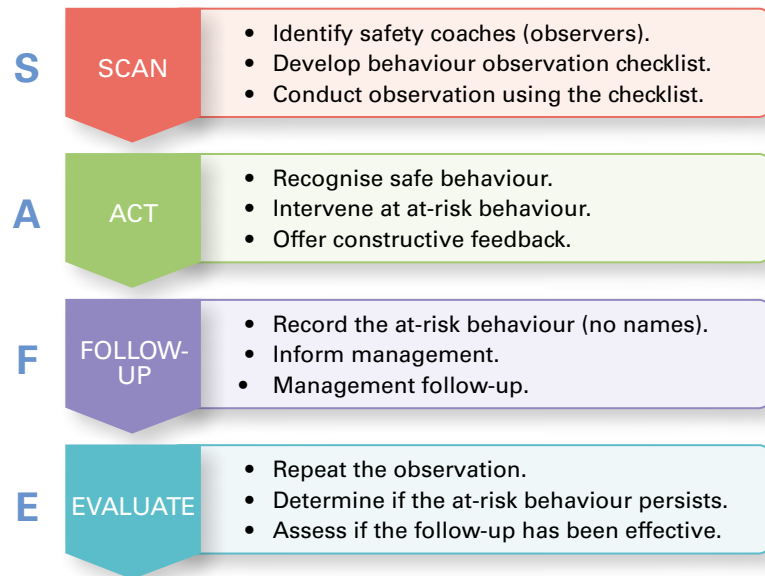


Figure 5: Behavioural Observation and Intervention methodology.

## Step 1 **SCAN**

### 1.1 Identify safety coaches (observers)

- All employees can serve as safety coaches.
- Companies new to BO&I may start by nominating members of the management team (e.g., managers, supervisors) as safety coaches.
- Alternatively, deploying WSH Advocates as safety coaches is also a good starting point (for more information on WSH Advocates, refer to WSH Council's *A Guide to the WSH Advocate Programme*).
- With time, this should progress to a stage where all employees can participate in WSH, to the point where each employee develops a sense of ownership of WSH and peer coaching becomes a reality.



## 1.2 Develop a behaviour observation checklist

- Obtain a copy of the behaviour observation checklist if it is already available.
- Alternatively, a new behaviour observation checklist can be developed keeping in mind the following:
  - The focus of the checklist is behaviour, not site conditions. For example, the checklist should not ask if the person under observation is using a work tool. Instead, it should ask how the tool is being used and whether the person has selected the correct tool for the job.
  - The checklist should remind the observer to focus on behaviour and that his/ her task is to distinguish between safe and at-risk work behaviour.
  - The checklist should be simple and easy to use with no more than 10 to 12 items. When the desired safe work habits have been successfully cultivated company-wide, they may be removed from the checklist and replaced with new ones.
  - To keep observations focused, companies may wish to explore the idea of creating specific themed checklists (e.g., a checklist on behaviours relating to safe use of machines, and/ or another on behaviours relating to safe use of tools).

See Annex A for guidance on creating a checklist for behaviours.

See Annex B for a sample generic behavioural observation checklist.

## 1.3 Conduct observations using the checklist

- Observations may be conducted one-to-one (i.e., observation of an individual) or one-to-many (i.e., group observation).
- Observation durations should be kept short (e.g., observations should be completed within 10 to 20 minutes). This is possible if the observation is focused on a particular theme and the checklist is limited to no more than 10 to 12 items per observation.
- Observations may be announced (i.e., planned observations) or unannounced (i.e., surprise observations). It is recommended for a company to begin with announced observations during the initial implementation and training process, progressing to unannounced observations as its WSH culture matures.

See Annex C for guidance on conducting behavioural observations.

## Step 2 ACT

The action to be taken will depend on the nature of the behaviour(s) observed (see Figure 6).

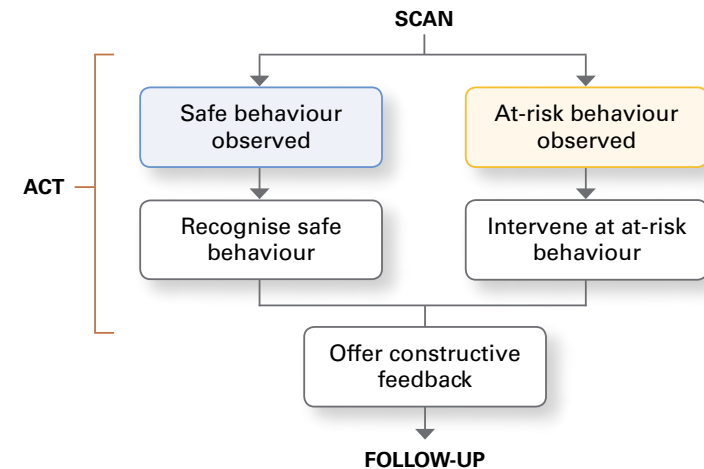


Figure 6: Diagram showing the progression of a behavioural observation from Scan to Act to Follow-up.

### 2.1 Recognise safe behaviour

- Observers can give recognition on-the-spot (e.g., verbal praise and encouragement), or later and more formally via company rewards or incentives (e.g., meal vouchers, model employee awards for good WSH performance). Safe work behaviour may also be recognised during staff appraisals as an individual performance attribute.
- The rationale for providing recognition is to positively reinforce that safe behaviours are desirable and the company actively supports such behaviours.

### 2.2 Intervene at at-risk behaviour

- Intervention is an important way for peers to show care for one another and ensure that everyone can remain safe at work.
- In cases where an at-risk behaviour creates a hazardous situation where someone could get hurt, the observer should immediately intervene to stop the behaviour or work process.
- As timely intervention can prevent accidents, intervention is essentially a proactive approach in assuring WSH.

### 2.3 Offer constructive feedback

- At the end of the observation, the observer should review the checklist and highlight key areas of exemplary employee performance.
- With a focus on specific at-risk behaviour, the observer should explain the associated WSH concern to workers. The observer should give advice on how the work can be carried out safely and discuss if alternative approaches are available to address the WSH concern.

## Step 3 FOLLOW-UP

### 3.1 Record the at-risk behaviour without the identity of the person involved

- When documenting the details of the at-risk behaviour observed, all observers should keep in mind the “no name, no blame” principle. Any written documentation concerning incident observations and associated findings should not contain the identity of the person being observed. Details can be recorded on a separate form or directly on the checklist itself.
- Immediate actions taken and suggested follow-up action(s) (if any) should also be documented.



### 3.2 Inform management of the incidence of at-risk behaviour

- Management may be informed directly, for example, via the department manager, the WSH manager or WSH officer. Alternatively, management may be kept informed through a representative from the WSH committee.
- For simple cases, management can be informed by submitting the completed checklist into a drop box. In more serious or complicated cases, observer(s) should submit their findings personally to a management representative as an in-depth explanation or discussion may be necessary.

### 3.3 Management follow-up

- Management follow-up is necessary to study each recorded case to identify factors that triggered at-risk behaviours (e.g., uncomfortable PPE), as well as barriers to safe behaviour (e.g., correct PPE not available).
- From there, strategies can be developed to remove factors that could trigger the at-risk behaviour, and/ or remove barriers to safe behaviour.
- The observation checklist should be amended (if necessary) to include the at-risk behaviour so that recurrence can be monitored.

## Step 4 EVALUATE

### 4.1 Repeat the observation

- Revisit Step 1 (Scan) and conduct behavioural observations again.
- As all records of at-risk behaviour submitted to management are anonymous with regard to the person being observed, repeat observations will not be able to target any specific employee. This ensures that all observations focus on behaviours, whether safe or at-risk, rather than individuals.

### 4.2 Determine if the at-risk behaviour persists

- Further observation (of different employees by different safety coaches) will ascertain if the recorded at-risk behaviour was an isolated case or a systemic problem throughout the organisation.

### 4.3 Assess if the follow-up has been effective

- If the at-risk behaviour persists, the current follow-up strategies adopted may need to be fine-tuned and a revisit of Step 3.3 (Management Follow-up) required.



## Tips for Successful Implementation of Behavioural Observation and Intervention

### TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF BEHAVIOURAL OBSERVATION AND INTERVENTION

Companies may consider the following recommendations for initiating and sustaining a BO&I programme. This section highlights considerations prior to, during and after BO&I implementation.

#### Considerations prior to implementation

- Obtain top management support for the BO&I initiative. Top management must embrace safety as a value, lead by example, and believe in the benefits of the initiative prior to the implementation of the initiative.
- Set up a BO&I steering committee to drive the initiative and oversee its implementation.
- Position BO&I as part of larger WSH initiatives involving capability development and culture building, such as bizSAFE and CultureSAFE.

#### Implementation strategies to consider

- Communicate the BO&I approach and its underlying principles to all employees company-wide.
- Empower employees to own and drive the BO&I process by granting them the authority to act on WSH concerns, so that they may proactively contribute towards WSH.
- Provide training for safety coaches-to-be in three key areas: WSH knowledge, observation skills, and coaching skills.
- Instead of a long checklist, keep behavioural observations short by focusing only on a few critical behaviours at a time.
- Ensure that the BO&I approach emphasises the positive reinforcement of safe work behaviours. Encourage safety coaches to give recognition on-the-spot whenever it is due. When handling at-risk behaviour, immediate intervention is necessary only when the at-risk behavior observed may cause a hazardous situation which can lead to a workplace accident or injury.
- Emphasise that the observation and feedback process must not be conducted in a confrontational manner, as it is not an inspection or audit.
- Progress from supervisor-to-worker to peer-to-peer observations, announced to unannounced observations, and intra-dept to inter-dept observations as the WSH culture of the company matures.
- Provide company rewards and incentives (e.g., meal vouchers for individuals, awards for teams) for repeated demonstrations of safe behaviours and good overall WSH performance.

### Considerations after initial implementation

- If quantitative results are required, identify simple ways to measure the performance of the BO&I initiative as the journey progresses, such as measuring the percentage of employees participating as safety coaches, frequency of observations, number of interventions, number of safe versus at-risk behaviours recorded, percentage of safe behaviours, and so on. However, beyond statistics, the initiative should focus on improving employee-employee interaction, raising WSH awareness, and effectively using observation findings as opportunities for WSH improvement.
- Continually evaluate and refine the BO&I initiative (e.g., once a year, but more frequently during the first year it is implemented).
- As the company's WSH culture matures, consider extending the BO&I initiative to include participation from all persons at the workplace (e.g., contractors, vendors and suppliers) as part of corporate social responsibility and to drive further WSH improvements.

## ANNEX A: GUIDE TO CREATING A CHECKLIST FOR BEHAVIOURS

A behavioural checklist is used to facilitate on-site job-specific observations and allow safety coaches to distinguish between safe behaviours and at-risk behaviours.

Behavioural checklists may be developed for a particular work location and/ or workplace activity.

The checklist form may have a dedicated space for recording the safety coach's name. However, there should be no space allocated for the name of the person(s) being observed.

Critical at-risk behaviours (for inclusion as possible checklist items) may be ascertained from any of the following:

- causal analysis of past accidents;
- in-depth reviews of near-miss incidents;
- studies of critical operating procedures;
- carrying out site inspections; and
- interviewing the workforce.

Divide the checklist items into behavioural categories to bring focus to the observations.

### Suggested categories for a behavioural checklist

#### Personal protective equipment

For example, correct use of safety spectacles, hearing protection, safety gloves, safety boots, safety helmet.

#### Work position

For example, appropriate body positions that avoid nip points or do not put the person at risk of falling.

#### Material handling

For example, body posture when lifting, pushing or pulling, correct use of mechanical aids.

### Tools and equipment

For example, using the correct tool, using the tool correctly, checking tools are in good condition.

### Operating procedures

For example, complying with permit requirements, adhering to SWPs.

### Communication

For example, verbal/ non-verbal communication with colleagues that affects WSH.

### Work environment

For example, whether the work areas are maintained properly, the walkways are unobstructed, materials and tools are properly organised, spills immediately cleaned up.

Write the behavioural checklist items in a positive tone, rather than as rules or instructions. Complete the checklist by including columns for "Safe Behaviour" and "At-risk Behaviour" on the right of each checklist item.

Refer to Annex B for a sample behavioural observation checklist.

## ANNEX B: SAMPLE BEHAVIOURAL OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Name of Safety Coach: Mr George Tan

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Site Observed: Construction site

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Activity Observed: Work at heights

SCAN	Critical Behaviour Checklist	Behaviour Observed		
		Safe	At-risk	NA
<b>Category: Operating Procedures</b>				
1	Demonstrate the safe work procedure for working-at-heights.			
2	Check that permit-for-work at heights has been obtained.			
3	Confirm risk controls are in place before starting work.			
<b>Category: Personal Protective Equipment</b>				
4	Select the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) for the job.			
5	Inspect condition of PPE before use.			
6	Fall protection: Apply fall arrest system correctly.			
<b>Category: Work Position</b>				
7	Ensure that temporary edge protection is in place before starting work.			
8	Work away from the edge of building unless necessary.			
9	Work in a safe manner to avoid falling over.			
<b>Category: Tools and Equipment</b>				
10	Select correct tool for the job.			
11	Check the tool's condition before use.			
12	Use the tool in the correct way.			

ACT	
Recognise Safe Behaviour	Action Taken
1	
2	
3	
Concern for At-risk Behaviour	Action Taken
1	
2	
3	

FOLLOW-UP	
Raise for Management Attention	
Factors that may trigger at-risk behaviour:	Potential barriers to safe behaviour:
Suggested management action(s):	

SAFETY AS A VALUE • CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER • MAKE SAFETY A HABIT • TOWARDS ZERO INJURIES

## ANNEX C: GUIDE TO CONDUCTING BEHAVIOURAL OBSERVATIONS

There are three essential components of a behavioural observation:

- (i) observe;
- (ii) intervene; and
- (iii) feedback.

### Observe

Regardless of whether an observation is announced or unannounced, safety coaches may practice the following as a general guide:

- (i) Maintain a suitable distance from the person or team being observed – this is so that the observation can take place unobtrusively without affecting the work being done.
- (ii) Pay attention to how the worker performs the task and look for safe behaviours that will prevent injuries and incidents, as well as at-risk behaviours that may lead to undesirable consequences. Keep each observation session to no longer than 20 minutes.
- (iii) Using the checklist, tick next to the checklist item to indicate whether the observed behaviour is “Safe” or “At-risk”. Insert comments that elaborate on the behaviours observed.
 

**Tip:** If the checklist is sufficiently brief, consider committing checklist items to memory and not using a clipboard as this will make the observation less formal.
- (iv) At the end of the observation, identify two to three safe behaviours and any at-risk behaviour(s) to be highlighted during feedback.

The behavioural observation process assumes that employees will perform their jobs as safely as they know how. However, even when a person is being observed, he/ she may still inadvertently demonstrate at-risk behaviour – behaviours the person did not recognise as being dangerous. Safety coaches should look out for such at-risk behaviours, as the person(s) being observed will benefit from the immediate feedback. Once the person being observed understands why the behaviour introduces risk and learns how the same task can be carried out more safely, he/ she is more likely to incorporate the newly-learned safe work behaviour into his/ her routine performance of the work task.

### **Intervene**

If the at-risk behaviour is likely to result in injury or incident, the safety coach should intervene immediately by stopping all work and explaining the WSH concern on-the-spot.

### **Feedback**

The safety coach may offer constructive feedback to the observed workers once the observation and checklist are completed. However, if a delay in giving feedback places workers at risk, immediate intervention is necessary.

As a general guide to providing feedback, the safety coach may:

- (i) Describe the behaviour(s) observed;
- (ii) Highlight the potential impact of the behaviour(s);
- (iii) Discuss the observation(s) with the person being observed and jointly recommend follow-up action; and
- (iv) Thank the person being observed for his/ her cooperation and contribution to the discussion.

To begin the feedback session, it is good practice to summarise and reinforce the safe behaviours that were observed, before highlighting one or two areas that require change. For at-risk behaviour, help the person being observed understand why the behaviour may be dangerous and work with him/ her to identify the root cause of the behaviour, as well as possible barriers to safe behaviour. These may be recorded on the checklist form for management follow-up.

While the feedback should be logical and based on fact, safety coaches should also show empathy and be sensitive to the emotional needs of the observed person(s). Ideally, safety coaches should aspire to come across as helpful but firm in a caring and non-demanding way.



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