



WHITE PAPER

The A-to-Z guide for managing health and safety in the small and medium enterprises of the supply chain

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Delphi, Greece

16 - 17 May 2026

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Workshop Information

Workshop Title: The A-to-Z Guide to Managing Health and Safety in Small and Medium Enterprises within the Supply Chain

Facilitator : Mr. Russell PRINCE

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Participants: The workshop convened professionals, business leaders, Health & Safety practitioners and representatives from a diverse range of organizations, providing a platform for the exchange of expertise, industry insights and best practices.

Purpose of this White Paper

This White Paper aims to capture and consolidate the key discussions, insights and practical recommendations that emerged during the workshop titled “The A - to - Z Guide to Managing Health and Safety in Small and Medium Enterprises within the Supply Chain”.

It serves as a reference document for professionals, organizations and stakeholders seeking to better understand the main challenges, perspectives and proposed approaches discussed by participants.

By summarizing the collective experience and viewpoints shared during the workshop, the paper highlights common themes, practical considerations and opportunities for further discussion, development and collaboration.

Executive Summary

This White Paper summarizes the key discussions, findings and recommendations that emerged during the workshop “The A - to - Z Guide to Managing Health and Safety in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) within the Supply Chain”.

The workshop explored practical approaches to Health and Safety Management within SMEs operating across diverse supply chain environments. Discussions focused on accountability within supply chains, contractor and subcontractor management, communication and coordination, competence, risk assessment, incident reporting, performance monitoring, emergency preparedness and workforce wellbeing.

Participants emphasized that effective Health and Safety Management is not determined by organizational size, but by clear responsibilities, effective communication, workforce competence, practical risk control measures and organizational learning. A key theme throughout the discussions was the concept of shared responsibility, recognizing that effective Health and Safety Management requires collaboration and coordination between clients, contractors and subcontractors across the supply chain.

The workshop also highlighted the importance of proportionate Health and Safety Management Systems that support operational effectiveness while remaining practical and achievable for SMEs. Participants agreed that management systems should focus on essential elements such as clear responsibilities, risk assessment, training, inspections, incident reporting and emergency preparedness, while avoiding unnecessary administrative complexity.

Key recommendations included the need for clearly defined responsibilities across supply chains, practical and risk-based management systems, effective communication and coordination mechanisms, proactive reporting processes and continued collaboration between clients, contractors and Health and Safety professionals.

Overall, the discussions concluded that successful Health and Safety Management within SMEs depends on leadership, communication, competence and practical risk management. Participants also reinforced an important principle: Health and Safety systems should support work, not complicate it. Continued industry dialogue and collaboration were identified as important factors in supporting the ongoing development of practical and proportionate Health and Safety approaches for SMEs.

1. Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) form the backbone of many modern supply chains. Across sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, construction, maintenance, facilities management and energy, SMEs undertake a significant proportion of operational activities and are often exposed to a wide range of workplace hazards.

While larger organizations may possess dedicated safety departments and extensive management systems, SMEs frequently operate with limited resources and simpler organizational structures. Despite these challenges, SMEs remain subject to the same fundamental objective as every organization: protecting people while delivering operational excellence.

The workshop “The A - to - Z Guide to Managing Health and Safety in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) within the Supply Chain” explored practical approaches to health and safety management that are achievable, proportionate and effective for SMEs. Participants shared experiences, challenges and ideas regarding contractor management, communication, competence, risk assessment and organizational culture.

This paper summarizes the key themes and recommendations that emerged from the workshop discussions.

2. Accountability Within the Supply Chain

One of the most consistent themes throughout the workshop was the importance of clearly defining responsibilities between clients, contractors and subcontractors.

Participants highlighted that confusion frequently exists regarding who is responsible for contractor supervision, risk assessment approval, incident reporting and the management of subcontracted activities. While responsibilities may vary depending on contractual arrangements and legal requirements, there was broad agreement that safety responsibilities should never be assumed and should always be clearly communicated.

The concept of shared responsibility was widely supported. Effective health and safety management within supply chains requires collaboration and coordination between all parties involved rather than the transfer of responsibility from one organization to another.

3. Proportionate Safety Management Systems

A significant area of discussion focused on what constitutes a practical and proportionate Health and Safety Management System for SMEs.

Participants recognized that many smaller organizations struggle when attempting to implement systems originally developed for large multinational companies. Excessive paperwork and administrative complexity can often become barriers to effective implementation.

The workshop therefore explored the concept of a simplified management system focused on essential elements that support risk control, legal compliance and operational effectiveness.

As a starting point, participants proposed that an SME Health and Safety Management System should contain the following minimum elements:

1. Health and Safety Policy
2. Roles and Responsibilities
3. Risk Assessments
4. Training Records
5. Inspection Records
6. Incident Reporting and Investigation (including both reactive and proactive reporting)
7. Emergency Procedures
8. Any additional documentation required by legislation, clients, insurers or specific industry requirements.

Participants agreed that these elements provide a practical foundation while allowing organizations flexibility to expand their systems according to their size, complexity and risk profile.

Importantly, it was recognized that the effectiveness of a management system should not be measured by the quantity of documentation produced, but by its ability to control risk, support operational activities and demonstrate due diligence.

4. Communication, Coordination and Competence

Workshop participants consistently identified communication as one of the most critical factors influencing safety performance.

Toolbox talks, pre-job briefings, inductions, contractor coordination meetings and effective supervision were all recognized as important mechanisms for ensuring that critical information reaches the workforce.

The discussion also highlighted that competence extends beyond qualifications and certificates. Participants agreed that competence should be viewed as a combination of training, experience, knowledge, supervision and the ability to recognize and respond appropriately to workplace hazards.

Managing competence across multiple contractors and subcontractors remains a significant challenge for many organizations operating within complex supply chains.

5. Practical Risk Assessment

Risk assessment was recognized as a fundamental component of effective health and safety management.

Participants agreed that risk assessments should be suitable, sufficient and practical. They should assist decision-making and risk control rather than become administrative exercises completed solely to satisfy documentation requirements.

Particular emphasis was placed on dynamic risk assessment and the importance of empowering workers to reassess conditions when circumstances change. Several participants noted that

unexpected conditions, changing work environments and contractor interactions frequently introduce hazards that may not have been fully considered during initial planning stages.

6. Incident Reporting and Organizational Learning

The workshop also explored how SMEs can establish effective reporting and learning processes without creating unnecessary complexity.

Participants supported simple reporting systems that encourage the reporting of incidents, near misses, unsafe conditions and safety observations. A positive reporting culture was considered essential for organizational learning and continuous improvement.

Discussion also highlighted the value of proactive indicators such as hazard observations and near-miss reporting, which may provide opportunities to prevent incidents before they occur.

7. Monitoring Performance

Effective monitoring and inspection processes were considered essential for maintaining operational control.

Participants suggested that SMEs should focus on inspections that address critical risks, workplace conditions, equipment integrity, emergency preparedness, contractor activities and housekeeping standards.

There was also support for using practical leading indicators such as completed inspections, corrective actions, training completion and hazard reporting rather than relying solely on lagging indicators such as injury statistics.

8. Emergency Preparedness and Wellbeing

Participants agreed that emergency preparedness should be proportionate to the risks faced by the organization.

Common scenarios identified included fire, medical emergencies, environmental incidents, utility failures and evacuation situations. Clear communication arrangements and defined responsibilities were considered essential components of effective emergency planning.

The workshop also recognized the growing importance of workforce wellbeing. Stress, fatigue and mental health were identified as factors that can influence both safety performance and organizational resilience.

9. Proposed SME Health and Safety Management Framework

While participants agreed that the proposed SME Health and Safety Management System provide a useful starting point, there was also broad recognition that further discussion is required before any model can be considered universally applicable.

SMEs operate across diverse industries with varying levels of risk, regulatory requirements, and client expectations. Consequently, participants agreed that the proposed structure should be viewed as a foundation for further discussion rather than a finalized solution.

10. Key Recommendations

Additional workshops and industry discussions were recommended to further explore topics such as contractor management, competence assurance, performance measurement, document control and the integration of client-specific requirements.

The workshop therefore concluded that the development of a practical, proportionate and widely accepted Health and Safety Management System for SMEs should remain an ongoing collaborative effort involving industry practitioners, clients, contractors and health and safety professionals.

11. Conclusions

The workshop demonstrated that effective health and safety management within SMEs does not depend on organizational size but on leadership, communication, competence and practical risk management.

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of proportionate systems that focus on controlling risk rather than generating unnecessary bureaucracy. Clear accountability, effective communication, workforce competence, practical risk assessment and organizational learning were identified as the key foundations of successful safety management within supply chains.

The discussions also reinforced an important principle: health and safety systems should support work, not complicate it.

While a proposed framework for SME Health and Safety Management Systems was developed during the workshop, participants agreed that further discussion and refinement are required. The topic remains highly relevant across industries and provides an excellent opportunity for continued collaboration and future workshop development.

Organizations that successfully balance operational requirements with practical and effective health and safety management are likely to achieve stronger safety performance, greater resilience and more sustainable business outcomes.

Acknowledgements

MANAGEMENT FORCE Group would like to express its sincere appreciation to the facilitators, co-facilitators, participants and representatives of the organizations who contributed to the workshop discussions held during the **18th SAFETY GALA**.

The knowledge, experience and perspectives shared throughout the discussions contributed significantly to the development of the findings and recommendations presented in this White Paper.