

Site Specific Safety Plans – room for improvement

Why a SSSP

Section of the HSWA 2015 provides that PCBU have a duty to protect workers and other persons against harm to their health, safety, and welfare by eliminating or minimising risks arising from work. Where there are multiple PCBU involved, sections 31- 34 of HSWA 2015 requires the PCBU to “consult, co-operate with, and co-ordinate activities with all other PCBUs who have a duty in relation to the same matter.” – commonly called “the 3 C’s”. Even if the interaction is as minor as a building owner calling the plumber to fix a leak this should be happening, although ideally the the plumber should provide the building owner with their assessment of the risks and controls as they are more familiar with the work. But the building owner should advise the plumber of significant risks they may be exposed to in working on the site. This exchange could be verbal but, more likely than not, is not happening at all.

In a more complex scenario, it is a different story. This is where the SSSP enters the picture. The SSSP details potential risks associate with the work and the site, how these will be controlled and what systems will be used to manage health and safety. The SSSP documents these and, if accepted by the other PCBU involved, meets the requirements of sections 31-34. The problem is many NZ companies cannot provide acceptable SSSP. Why?

Tick the box

Firstly, many do not understand the purpose of a SSSP. They see it as information they need to provide in order to be awarded work. “As painless as possible” is the attitude, so pulling some forms or creating a hazard list from a pick list is used to meet this objective. This is classic “tick the box” stuff. It is not identifying the critical hazards and controls and showing the business has robust health and safety management systems in place to support health and safety performance in practice.

Resource implications

Secondly, SME don't have dedicated HSE resources to prepare these things. However, a quality customised should SSSP be sufficient in most cases, provided the risks of specific sites are assessed and the particular requirements of those in management control of the site (typically the landlord) are accommodated. So a business investing some effort in developing their own SSSP should be worthwhile.

Site specific not generic

Thirdly, the first “S” in SSSP is Site. You can't, as one prominent HSE provider advertises “Create a Site Specific Safety Plan (SSSP) in minutes using the handy generator. ... just answer a few simple questions to automatically generate a plan.” Most SSSP are fine with the task risks as these are relatively constant. What they miss is site risks – power lines, forklift operations, loading zones, high risk activity on site, noise, dust etc.

Monitoring

Fourth, paper does not deliver health and safety. It is what happens in reality that matters and, to this end, monitoring is key. Yet the self-inspection templates provided in SSSP are woefully deficient. The main issue is the content is not aligned to the controls that the process is meant to be checking. Monitoring is not about checking a box, it is about identifying whether controls for this work on this site are working and, if not, fixing it. The SSSP is thus a living document and simply the front end of a process.

Long JSA are pointless

Fifth, the JSA / JSEA / TA. Whatever the name, this document details the work steps and the associated risk arising from the tasks and associated with the site and the controls required. It assumes workers are inducted and know applicable safe work procedures so it highlights the critical risks and controls. It is completed on a daily basis. The JSA is designed not only to review the risks and controls, but also to ensure everyone is informed on the basics like tools, PPE and Supervisor details. The form is then signed off by the workers doing the work. How you can do this with a 20 page form is beyond me – but that is what many of the online systems do. Again, people are missing the point – the JSA is not a form to be added to the conformance pile. It is a critical tool in keeping people informed and safe.

In summary:

- SSSP produced by SME in NZ need to improve.
- SSSP need to be specific to and reflect the business – toss out the standard forms and pick lists. Reviewers want to see your work not a consultants.
- SSSP need to reflect the specific site – that's why there are 3 "S's"
- However, once you have developed your standard template it can be the foundation of SSSP going forward, if updated to reflect each site.
- JSA are one weak point in SSSP – if you can't produce daily and it is more than 2 pages you are doing it wrong.
- Monitoring is the key – it needs to reflect your critical controls and identifying areas for improvement (unless you are perfect).

Paul Christiansen

20 Feb 2026