

Delivering on Training Requirements in a Virtual Setting

Last year we spoke about managing major accident hazards at high hazard establishments in the face of COVID-19, but at the time we couldn't have predicted that the "temporary" measures associated with the pandemic would still be in place almost a year on. It has been a firm standpoint of the COMAH Competent Authority that regulatory activities must continue despite the pandemic, with many sites having to carefully think about how to demonstrate that they can maintain safe operations while adapting to reduced manning and other COVID measures.

Overall, it feels like our industry has risen to the challenge and adapted well, even where we thought that some process safety activities would be impossible to achieve. From our perspective, this in particular means HAZOP and other hazard identification studies, ALARP sessions and information gathering for assessments and reports. It was once unthinkable that any of these processes should be carried out remotely, but where needs-must, we have adapted well and managed to maintain the necessary high standards of work. That's not to say that all work going forward should be carried out remotely; we still recommend that studies are consolidated by an onsite review once things return to normal. On the whole, though, industry has learnt a lot about maintaining the highest standards of major accident hazards in a more virtual world.

The same goes for training. It has been great to see our clients embracing online training in favour of delaying face-to-face sessions until more 'normal' times. By adopting the most suitable video conferencing platforms, we have been able to adapt our workshop style of training facilitation and feedback has remained positive. There have been some lessons learnt along the way that we look forward to implementing as we widen our training capacity in 2021.

Limiting delegate numbers to smaller groups helps greatly in keeping up the energy needed for a productive training session. Facilitation is largely about engaging with delegates to make the most of their experience and make sure that the key messages stay relevant to them. This is easy when speaking

face to face with delegates, when you can use body language to gauge feelings and change direction. Technology can become a barrier to communication but working with smaller groups can create a more comfortable atmosphere with more open discussion which ultimately helps delegates get the most from their course.

Shorter sessions have also been of great benefit. When the time and expense associated with travel is limited, there is more flexibility in session start and end times, which has worked to the delegates' advantage. Staying focussed on a video conference all day is tough on anyone, not to mention operators and technicians who would normally spend a lot of their time in the field. By limiting online training sessions

to multiple shorter sessions, engagement has been positive and more consistent.

Successful training relies on a balance of delivery techniques that address the different learning styles of the delegates. Online video conferencing platforms no longer limit trainers to Powerpoint presentations and a lecture style of delivery. Using break-out rooms for small groups of delegates helps to engage those with more active learning styles by allowing them to participate in activities and apply what they are learning to practical situations from the outset. For those with more visual and aural learning styles,

shared screens, whiteboards and chat functions all help to ensure that information is delivered in a way that benefits the individual and makes it easier for trainers to quickly adapt to the needs of the delegates.

Overall, it can be tempting to shy away from online training delivery in favour of delaying courses until they can be delivered in person. However, online methods of delivery can be quickly adapted to suit the organisation and the individual, which can result in positive training outcomes. We will be continuing to implement what we have learnt as we deliver online training to our clients through 2021. By bearing these lessons in mind, we can confidently deliver our bespoke courses in all aspects of process safety, as well as our new offerings of the Cogent Process Safety Management for Operators (PSMO) and Bowtie use and application, ultimately allowing operators to continue to demonstrate that they can maintain safe and efficient operations in this 'new normal'.

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