

The Thirteen Safety Functions of a Good Supervisor

**Rick Callor, CSP, STS
Cece M. Weldon, CSP, CHMM STS
URS Corporation**

Introduction

The roles and responsibilities of a supervisor have evolved over time, especially as it relates to safety. This paper will specify the safety duties and responsibilities of a supervisor as identified in the blueprint for the Safety Trained Supervisor (STS) Certification. Each of the following will be discussed in detail:

- Define the role of a supervisor
- Describe the roles and responsibilities of a supervisor
- Outline the Thirteen Safety Functions of a Good Supervisor
- Understand the knowledge and skills required to perform the Thirteen Safety Functions of a Good Supervisor

What is a Supervisor?

A supervisor is a person who supervises workers or the work done by others; one that directs or oversees a person, group, department, organization, or operation. A supervisor has defined accountability for actions by the persons being supervised and the effects of these actions within the scope of the work authorized to be performed.

The definition of a supervisor is referenced in the Webster Dictionary and has remained the same with very minor changes through the years, although the demands of the job have changed significantly with increased responsibilities for employee safety, coaching, and training. The definition indicates that they must observe workers or work done by others and is further defined as one who directs or oversees a person, group, department, organization, or operation. While the scope can thus be broad in application, there is a fundamental duty of care to prevent accidents and cases of work-related illnesses and provide adequate control of health and safety risks arising from work activities.

Roles and Responsibilities of Supervisors

The roles and responsibilities of the first-line supervisor are forever changing. Even so, the roles and responsibilities represent the direct link between management and the workforce. There is a responsibility to produce quality goods and/or services. The supervisor is also responsible for assuring job quality, providing job training, coaching and motivating employees, facilitating the

development of good safety attitudes, and coordinating in the detection of hazardous conditions and the identification of unsafe work practices.

The supervisor needs to understand the techniques and psychology of human relations. They should know the fundamentals of loss control practices, as well as federal and local safety and health regulations. Knowledge and understanding of the potential hazards the workers can encounter, how to prevent them, and/or what safeguards and personal protective equipment (PPE) are needed is critical to the supervisors' role. Even though the supervisor is not an expert on every piece of PPE, supervisors should know how to use and maintain the equipment, and how to enforce the use of the equipment. They must also be able to assist in accident investigations that occur in their area of responsibility. Supervisors should be able to recognize when their workers need to seek help for problems in adjusting to work shift changes, stressful environments, or job changes, as well as providing assistance and direction for dealing with personal problems and possible drug and alcohol problems.

The roles and responsibilities of a supervisor mentioned above are those referenced in the National Safety Council's Supervisors' Safety Manual and have remained the same for many years. An outline of those roles and responsibilities follows:

Roles:

- Serve as direct link between the workforce and management
- Responsible for production of goods or services

Responsibilities:

- Quality control job training
- Employee motivation
- Development of good safety attitudes
- Detection of hazardous conditions and unsafe work practices

Knowledge and understanding:

- Understand the techniques and psychology of human relations
- Fundamentals of loss control
- Applicable industry standards
- Federal and local safety and health regulations
- Potential hazards workers can encounter and how to prevent them
- What safeguards and PPE must be put in place or used and enforcement of their use
- Assist in accident investigations in their area of responsibility
- Recognize when their workers need help for stress, or other problems including resources for assisting in personal and drug or alcohol abuse

These are the basic roles and responsibilities that have been published and used for many years. With the ever changing work environment and work force, there are an increasing number of other roles and responsibilities that should be required of supervisors. The identification and assessment of capabilities of supervisors for these ever challenging roles represents a formidable

task for most employers. At URS Corporation, for the past 11 years we have used the STS Certification as a leading indicator for safety performance in our business units.

We will now take a look at the blueprint for the STS Certification examination and discuss the role delineation of a supervisor based on information gathered from those who perform supervisory duties at actual job sites and some safety supervisors from various industries. This process has developed a format identified as the Thirteen Safety Functions of a Good Supervisor.

The Thirteen Safety Functions of a Good Supervisor

Function 1 – Risk Assessment

Conduct risk assessments by performing pre-task analysis and evaluating PPE, tools, equipment, and job expectations, in order to mitigate hazardous conditions and minimize the risk of incident or injury.

Knowledge areas:

1. Principles of risk assessment
2. Risk assessment procedures
3. Components of pre-task hazard analyses
4. Hazards associated with tasks
5. Available or applicable PPE, tools, and equipment
6. Limitations of PPE, tools, and equipment
7. Proper use, care, and maintenance requirements of PPE, tools, and equipment

Skills:

1. Communicating effectively
2. Developing and conducting pre-task hazard analysis
3. Recognizing hazards and mitigating exposures
4. Using, caring for, and maintaining PPE, tools, and equipment
5. Inspecting for the proper use, care, and maintenance of PPE, tools, and equipment
6. Using testing equipment (e.g., air quality, air velocity, noise)
7. Creating proper documentation

Function 2 – Competency

Confirm that employees have the necessary job-specific technical skills and qualifications by observing work practices or reviewing training records in order to ensure competent staff.

Knowledge areas:

1. Work practices and procedures
2. Procedures for observing work practices
3. Training requirements for job tasks
4. Sources for applicable standards (e.g., consensus standards, government agencies, manufacturers, company policy)

Skills:

1. Recognizing desirable and undesirable workplace behavior (e.g., proactive, impaired)
2. Measuring employee performance through observation

3. Accessing and reading training records
4. Applying applicable standards to the evaluation of employee's technical skills

Function 3 – Orientation

Ensure that personnel in the work area are oriented to safety and health considerations by communicating hazardous conditions and monitoring behaviors in order to help ensure that applicable rules and emergency action plans are understood.

Knowledge areas:

1. Principles of hazard assessment
2. Components of new hire orientation programs
3. Principles of risk assessment
4. Components of emergency action plans
5. Sources for applicable standards (e.g., consensus standards, government agencies, manufacturers, company policy)
6. Principles of behavior-based safety
7. Characteristics of proactive and reactive safety cultures

Skills:

1. Communicating hazards
2. Conducting new employee orientation
3. Recognizing hazards and mitigating exposures
4. Conducting worksite inspections
5. Conducting safety meetings
6. Coaching safe behavior
7. Comparing safety performance to applicable standards
8. Communicating the emergency action plan

Function 4 – Observation

Evaluate work practices by observing employees' behavior and their use of PPE, tools, and equipment in order to minimize the risk of incident or injury and to comply with applicable standards.

Knowledge areas:

1. Work practices and procedures
2. Types of work place behavior (e.g., proactive, impaired)
3. Available or applicable PPE, tools, and equipment
4. Proper use, care, and maintenance requirements of PPE, tools, and equipment
5. Sources for applicable standards (e.g., consensus standards, government agencies, manufacturers, company policy)

Skills:

1. Recognizing desirable and undesirable workplace behavior
2. Measuring employees' performance through observation
3. Defusing emotionally charged situations.

Function 5 – Coaching

Ensure safety and health standards are implemented through coaching and by correcting observed deficiencies in order to maintain a safe and healthful work environment.

Knowledge areas:

1. Methods of implementing safety and health rules and regulations
2. Methods for coaching employees
3. Methods for correcting observed deficiencies
4. Sources for applicable standards (e.g., consensus standards, government agencies, manufacturers, company policy)

Skills:

1. Coaching safe behavior
2. Correcting observed deficiencies
3. Applying safety and health standards appropriately

Function 6 – Action

Take appropriate action when confronted with unsafe acts and conditions by exercising stop-work authority, modifying tasks, escalating issues to higher management, consulting with qualified professionals (when the matter is outside the scope of the supervisors capabilities, etc) and disciplining employees in order to minimize the risk of incident or injury.

Knowledge areas:

1. Work practices and procedures
2. Types of workplace behavior
3. Unsafe acts and conditions
4. Stop-work policies and procedures
5. Modifications of tasks to improve safety
6. Organizational structure and lines of communication
7. Disciplinary policies and procedures
8. Roles and responsibilities of management and coworkers

Skills:

1. Recognizing unsafe acts and conditions
2. Responding to unsafe acts and conditions
3. Exercising leadership
4. Communicating effectively
5. Documenting unsafe behaviors and conditions, and actions taken in response

Function 7 – Culture

Facilitate a positive, proactive safety culture by anticipating hazards, modeling and coaching safe behavior, reporting incidents, encouraging employee participation, and communicating performance measures in order to enhance safety and health.

Knowledge areas:

1. Characteristics of a positive safety culture

2. Safe work practices and procedures
3. Types of workplace behavior (e.g., proactive, impaired)
4. Methods of modeling and coaching safe behavior
5. Methods of correcting observed deficiencies
6. Sources for applicable standards (e.g., consensus standards, government agencies, manufacturers, company policy)
7. Policies and procedures related to incident reporting

Skills:

1. Recognizing and rewarding safe work practices
2. Correcting observed deficiencies
3. Conducting safety meetings
4. Modeling and coaching safe behavior
5. Applying safety and health standards appropriately

Function 8 – Performance Evaluation

Evaluate employees using safety performance and behavior as key criteria in order to hold employees accountable for safety.

Knowledge areas:

1. Components of employee performance systems
2. Essential behavior to include in performance evaluations (e.g., job safety requirements, attitude toward safety, use of PPE, tools, and equipment)
3. Principles of behavior based safety
4. Methods of encouraging proactive workplace behavior
5. Methods for holding employees accountable for safe work performance (e.g., positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement)

Skills:

1. Making objective observations
2. Comparing safety performance to applicable standards (e.g., consensus standards, government agencies, manufacturers, and company policy)
3. Providing feedback on safe work performance
4. Communicating proactively
5. Listening to suggestions
6. Tasking disciplinary actions

Function 9 – Investigations

Participate in investigations that determine causes, identify corrective actions, document lessons learned, and address employee concerns using recognized investigation techniques in order to minimize the risk of workplace incidents.

Knowledge areas:

1. Work practices and procedures
2. Types of workplace behavior (e.g., proactive, impaired)
3. Available or applicable PPE, tools, and equipment

4. Limitations of PPE, tools, and equipment
5. Proper use, care, and maintenance requirements of PPE, tools, and equipment
6. Principles of incident investigation and root cause analysis
7. Roles and responsibilities of various personnel involved with investigations
8. Communication requirements related to investigation at all organizations levels (e.g., crisis management, company policy)
9. Development and uses of lessons learned

Skills:

1. Conducting incident investigations
2. Identifying corrective actions
3. Identifying root causes
4. Accessing and documenting lessons learned
5. Addressing employees' concerns
6. Communicating effectively

Function 10 – Emergency Planning

Verify the effectiveness of emergency action plans through training and practice in order to ensure effective response in crises.

Knowledge areas:

1. Principles of emergency action planning
2. Components of emergency action plans
3. Training techniques and exercises (e.g., simulation, drill)
4. Crisis management techniques that include first response protocols

Skills:

1. Communicating the emergency action plan
2. Conducting emergency action drills
3. Conducting training related to emergency action plans and crisis management plans
4. Preparing after-action reports that include lessons learned

Function 11 – Communication

Coordinate operations and work processes with other supervisors by communicating effectively in order to minimize risk.

Knowledge areas:

1. Roles and responsibilities of other management personnel
2. Work practices and procedures
3. Available or applicable PPE, tools, and equipment
4. Communication strategies and requirements
5. Crew coordination techniques (e.g., between shift changes, upon recognizing adjacent area hazards)
6. Inspection and documentation procedures

7. Hazards related to work processes

Skills:

1. Communicating effectively
2. Using standard terminology
3. Recognizing hazards and mitigating exposures
4. Minimizing exposures thru risk assessment
5. Recording shift events

Function 12 – Recordkeeping

Perform safety and health related record keeping in accordance with applicable standards using established procedures in order to document essential processes.

Knowledge areas:

1. Events that require documentation (e.g., task analysis, safety meetings, on-the-job training, inspections, incident investigations)
2. Safety and health record keeping system
3. Sources for applicable standards (e.g., consensus standards, government agencies, manufacturers, company policy)
4. Confidentiality requirements

Skills:

1. Writing clearly and effectively
2. Using established documentation procedures and forms
3. Maintaining confidentiality of records

Function 13 – Ethics

Comply with company and STS codes of ethics by resolving issues consistently with these requirements in order to protect the interests of employees, employers, and other stakeholders.

Knowledge areas:

1. Components of company and STS codes of ethics

Skills:

1. Resolving issues ethically
2. Communicating effectively

Conclusion

The roles and responsibilities of a supervisor are continually evolving. A good supervisor helps an employer implement safety programs at the worker level through supervisory, safety committee or similar safety and health leadership roles. Properly training a supervisor on the functions noted above will enhance a supervisor's safety skills and likely the safety performance of a location or job.

Since our company began preparing and training our supervisors for the STS Certification in 2000, we have had over 2500 employees take the test and obtain the certification. Along with all the many other ES&H programs we have implemented, we have seen an 80-85% decrease in our Workers' Compensation premiums during that same period of time. We feel that the STS Program is the most effective program we have in place because of the training and certification aspects of the STS Certification.

Bibliography

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