

Communication with Foreign Workers

GUIDANCE NOTE	COMMUNICATION WITH FOREIGN WORKERS	Code: D001	Issue: C
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INTRODUCTION

Good communication is essential to ensure a safe working environment. The construction industry relies heavily on the employment of foreign nationals, which can present communication difficulties. Many workers have only a basic level of understanding of the English language. Employers must be able to ensure that the health and safety message is communicated to everyone at risk, whatever their ethnic background or standard of literacy.

RISKS IDENTIFIED

The majority of risks arise from an inability to understand written or verbal instructions, how equipment works or specific warnings. Failure to understand instructions places workers in danger to themselves and also endangers other work colleagues.

SOLUTIONS

There are many solutions available to help improve communication:

- Buddy system. - Use of an English speaking compatriot to act as an interpreter to pass on information and act as a minder for the non-English speaker.
- Design. - Consideration at the design/procurement stages of a contract to ensure tender documents address this issue. Request that contractors have appropriate arrangements and funding in place.
- Guidance. - Provision of information in various languages and formats, including pictograms, clear diagrams, pocket safety notes, etc. for providing essential information.
- Inductions. - Inductions could be carried out in a variety of languages where appropriate. Detailed explanation of site procedures and site signage is essential.
- Supervision. - Increased supervision and appropriate training to ensure correct working practices are followed. Ideally the supervisor should be bilingual.
- Toolbox talks. - Regular toolbox talks are an essential part of ongoing consultation with employees, these must be relevant and an interpreter could be employed if English is not understood.
- Training. - It is essential that the operative is competent to undertake the task and they must be appropriately trained. Training media is often available in different languages. However, there is a risk that the individual may not have an adequate understanding of signs and instruction, which must not be overlooked.
- Translators/translation. - Where the workforce has difficulty with the English language individuals can be provided with a list of commonly used words and their meanings, wording can be replaced with pictograms, simple instructions and guidelines in a number of common foreign languages can be provided and it can be ensured that groups of foreign operatives have at least one bilingual member to interpret. Provide important documentation such as method statements and risk assessments in the employee's native language.

