

Managing Critical Risks

A case study from Te Papa Atawhai Department of Conservation

Lou Sanson, Chief Executive

I know Te Papa Atawhai is not alone in developing a critical risk standard. Organisations committed to health and safety must focus on their critical risks, and particularly those like ours with inherent health and safety risks.

But before I outline our critical risk in more depth, I would like to briefly outline our Health and Safety journey over the last months. We have spent significant effort in reviewing, improving and integrating our Health and Safety systems. We have importantly also given our people practical tools to support the behaviours needed for a strong Health and Safety culture.

The lockdown period in March/April 2020 gave us an opportunity to refresh two of our critical Health and Safety Systems – Safe to Start and Stop for Safety. We knew restarting work post the lockdown would be a challenge for many, particularly for those field staff who were eager to get back out. We wanted to ensure our entire workforce be reoriented into our Health and Safety system. Everyone at Te Papa Atawhai, irrespective of their role completed an online Safe to Start module and leader-led facilitated discussion on restarting work safely.

It was during this period that our Critical Risk Standard was formally released. Central to this was ensuring everyone has a good understanding of risk – which are broad and varied depending on the work undertaken. We were particularly focused on our eight critical risks. We wanted our people to understand why we were so focused on these Critical Risks and the controls we use to manage these.

Our eight critical risks: On-road vehicle driving; Helicopter use; Boats; Work at height; Chainsaw use; Lone worker/threats; Diving with scuba; and Psychosocial.

This doesn't mean we ignore other risks. We don't. But critical risks (predominantly low frequency but high consequence) require a different management approach to other risks. Through a mix of data and reasoning, and with the involvement of our people, we have landed on what I believe is a very solid approach to managing our critical risks. In a nutshell this is:

1. Identification of the critical risks
2. Identification of the critical risk controls through bow tie analysis
3. Implementation of the critical risk controls
4. Verification of the critical risk controls; and
5. Audit of the Critical Risk Standard as part of the Health and Safety Management System



Each of these is a specific task in itself and requires much consideration and the involvement of others, particularly our people who have proved to be a very important cog in this wheel.

I want to focus on the fourth point - verification - which is where we are now. An essential part of any critical risk programme is providing assurance on critical risk controls, in our case to myself and the remainder of my Safety Governance Group, that the critical risk controls we've put in place are actually in place 'on the ground' and that they are effective.

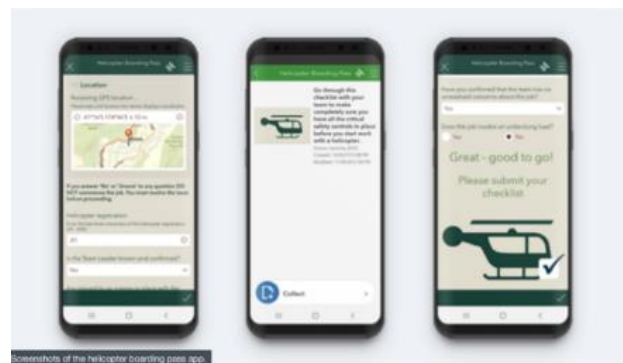
It's all very well to have standard operating procedures with mandatory controls, but I need assurance on the efficacy of our critical risk controls in preventing harm to our people.

Hence the verification programme.

Each of the critical risk controls will need to be verified – this will be done by verifiers, who have volunteered to undertake verifications. A number of our people have volunteered to become verifiers of a critical risk they have particular expertise and/or interest in. These people are currently being trained and verification of some of the critical risks are about to get underway. This involves going into the field, viewing, and testing the controls in place, and soliciting feedback. Of course, there are two parts to this. We also want to learn of any road-blocks staff may have, and importantly whether they are doing work in a safer manner than even our SOPs prescribe.

This is a very exciting part of the Critical Risk Standard and I'm looking forward to reading the first of the governance reports.

Part of the critical risk programme is the development of 'critical risk control checks' for some of the risks. For example, the Health and Safety Team have developed a 'boarding pass' app for helicopter work, which is required to be completed just before boarding a helicopter. If all the checks haven't been completed, then they can't start the work.



And finally, we know that even if work is Safe to Start, that doesn't mean it will stay safe. Through various tools that were developed staff were encouraged to call a Stop for Safety if they thought there was an unsafe condition developing. Anyone at Te Papa Atawhai is authorised to Stop work they see as unsafe. Work doesn't resume until the problem has been resolved and the whole team is comfortable that it's safe to restart work.

I celebrate every Stop called. It is a way to acknowledge the courage it takes to call unsafe behaviours and learn from every opportunity.

Lou Sanson
Director General