



## Case study: Rethinking the philosophy - First Gas

### The problem

First Gas supplies gas via 2,500 kms of high-pressure gas transmission pipes and 4,800 kms of gas distribution pipes in New Zealand. With our field staff and a substantial contractor base, there are many people exposed to high-risk activities, and there is potential for major accidents. Staff feedback about health and safety (H&S) in the business was consistently negative and a lack of engagement in H&S was causing concern.

The first stage of the innovation was to understand the problem. This was done by conducting a worker survey. While not everybody was entirely negative, the survey included far too many pieces of feedback such as:

- *“The procedures are long and tedious. Too much focus on the small stuff and not paying attention to the important stuff.”*
- *“There is an over emphasis on policing and the use of tick boxes.”*
- *“Too much irrelevant paperwork, which does nothing to keep the guys on the ground safe. It actually distracts from the real work at hand.”*

H&S was perceived as a handbrake and a restriction that was bureaucratic and tightly policed.

Given the high-risk nature of the First Gas operations, the robustness of controls needed to be high and the assurance around them rigorous. The challenge therefore lay in maintaining this degree of rigour without it becoming bureaucratic and too controlling.

### The solution

A safety II/safety differently/new view approach was adopted in late 2018 and a range of activities were undertaken to try to work through the problem.

The most important activity was to redefine the H&S philosophy. This philosophy shift is best explained by the introduction of the First Principles to replace their previous version of golden rules.

Volunteers from around the business were pulled into a review team who canvassed their teams for their opinion of the rules. The general feelings were that:

- it was hard to show compliance
- field workers felt that they were a target because all the rules were sharp-end focussed
- the rules were generally inadequate to deal with the various real world challenges that were thrown up every day.

The First Principles were developed as a replacement. These were designed to deal more with ‘How we work’, rather than ‘What we do.’ If people understand how to do things, this will help them deal with whatever situations arise, rather than trying to tell people what to do, which inevitably falls short through a failure to predict all scenarios. These principles were developed in conjunction with

the review team and workshops were held around the business, so all staff had the chance to provide input.

There are three components:

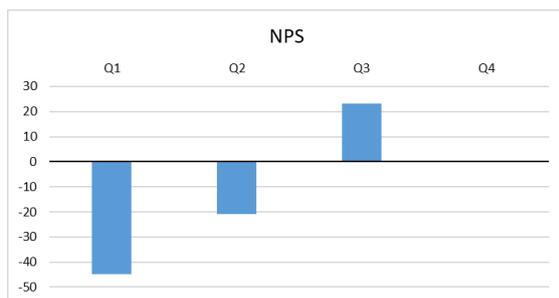
- The philosophy – this embeds the ideals First Gas holds. Key points here are the aspects of trusting in workers’ knowledge and skill; acknowledging that people are fallible and will make mistakes. **This has effectively enshrined psychological safety into policy.**
- The critical risks – these were designed to be broader than just field risks, acknowledging the role that people behind the scenes play, e.g. in design, and the risks that apply to non-field workers such as wellbeing. These provide guidance and boundaries rather than being specific about the details of risk management.
- Key concept – safe work = successful work. Safety is simply an output of work done well.

On rolling out the new First Principles, teams discussed which of them were most applicable to their area and had the option of adding specific things that made sense in their environment.

### What we learned

People really like the new approach, describing it as more human. This is emphasised with many visitors to the organisation asking questions and taking photos of the First Principles poster.

To measure its impact, First Gas developed a net promoter score (NPS) survey to find out how people within the organisation viewed the new approach which was launched in Q1. The turnaround in attitude was incredible and much faster than expected.



During this time there was also a significant reduction in high potential near miss events.

This innovation was about reimagining the health and safety philosophy of First Gas, taking into account new research and thinking in this field. A change in the philosophy has created a ripple effect into all areas of the business and delivered safer and more successful work outcomes.

Key tips:

- Define the philosophy right at the beginning of the change process. This helps everybody really understand the intended outcome and makes other initiatives easier to implement
- Involve people from the whole business to genuinely co-create a solution. This is much more effective than designing something and asking for feedback.

**First Principles**

First Principles				
RESPECT THE RISK	UNDERSTAND THE WORK	HARNESS KNOWLEDGE	LISTEN, LEARN, IMPROVE	WORK TOGETHER
We respect the risks of the work we do and commit to managing high risks with care and thoroughness. We keep the risk discussion alive – always vigilant. We stop if we're not sure.	We take time to understand the reality of how work is done. We understand that people are not perfect – we take ownership of our work and our mistakes and respond fairly to others.	We trust in the expertise of our team to deliver successful work. We move decisions to where the expertise lies.	We look for improvement opportunities and take ownership to make them happen. We are comfortable speaking up and do not judge issues raised by others.	We value the skills and experiences of different teams and work together to embed HSEQ into successful work.

**Critical Risk Management**

DESIGN FOR SAFETY	ISOLATE ENERGY	CONTROL IGNITION	MANAGE CHANGE	DRIVE SAFELY	ENSURE WELLBEING
Incorporate rigorous review of designs and processes to minimise risks and improve operation.	Isolate sources of energy and double check before work.	Manage ignition sources in hazardous areas. Use well-maintained, certified equipment.	In the event of change, stop and reassess hazards and controls and communicate findings.	Manage driver fatigue. Use robust vehicles appropriate for the activity.	Maintain a supportive working environment, with care for each other.

**Successful Work** ↔ **Safe Work**

Successful Work: Problem solving, Risk management, Continuous improvement, Respectful environment, Feedback, Leadership, Planning, Knowledge and understanding, Openness to challenge, Communication, Collaboration, Personal ownership, Trust.

Safe Work: Problem solving, Risk management, Continuous improvement, Respectful environment, Feedback, Leadership, Planning, Knowledge and understanding, Openness to challenge, Communication, Collaboration, Personal ownership, Trust.

Logos: Firstgas, rockgas, Flexgas