

Teamsafe

Teamsafe ambassadors have been flying high, spreading their safety message to hundreds of employees of the flying kangaroo. Often described as the 'Australian airline with the world's best safety record', Qantas recently engaged SCI Australia to deliver the Teamsafe safety program to engineers in its maintenance workshops in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne during Qantas Safety Week. A regular schedule for presentations at other Qantas work centres will be introduced later in the year.

Now widely regarded as one of Australia's most innovative approaches to occupational health and safety, Teamsafe features a specially trained team of wheelchair ambassadors who use their personal 'real story' to promote safety in the workplace.

The program was first evaluated by senior management of the Qantas Aircraft Customer Services section early last year, with Group General Manager, Murray Harris, quickly becoming an enthusiastic supporter. He joined with Occupational Health and Safety Facilitator, Kevin Sheridan, in recognising how successfully the program reinforces the traditional messages of 'safety first' and 'watch out for your workmates'.

When Ambassador David Crawford related his personal story to engineers at the Sydney International Operations facility, he stressed the importance of speaking out if safety is in question. David was severely injured when he fell from a partly constructed roof on a Sydney building site. His story is all the more poignant because he had warned supervisors about faulty work which later brought about his accident.

David's accident sparked a major review of building site safety and, following the conclusion of his legal proceedings, new regulations were introduced covering scaffolding, harnesses and roof railings.

After hearing David's presentation, Sydney maintenance supervisor Rod Hesse urged his workmates to think very carefully about what they had just heard. "There is an important warning here for all of us and it really deserves some serious thought," said Rod. "What the Teamsafe message says is that, yes, it can happen to me. Younger workers especially need to understand the consequences of complacency and taking risks. I just wish I had brought my own son along today to listen to this. As a young builder he is often in potentially dangerous situations and sometimes I worry about his attitude to personal safety. It's extremely important to remember that things can go wrong even in a normally safe working environment."



The message for Qantas maintenance workers in Brisbane was all about the ever-present danger of complacency. Teamsafe Ambassador John Wade, a veteran scuba diver with 40 years experience and a dive master, told how he ignored accepted safety precautions during a dive with two novices. While he ensured that they survived a day of treacherous conditions, he failed to monitor his own time in deep water and suffered an attack of the bends. Despite later treatment in a special recompression chamber, a small bubble of nitrogen lodged against his spinal cord just below the shoulder blades causing paraplegia.

John's message was straight to the point. "I didn't even bother to look at the regulation timetables which tell you how much time you can safely spend at which depth. Because I had done it so often I assumed I was within the acceptable limit, but I was wrong. As a result I lost the normal use of my legs, for life. For me, one act of complacency was enough to change my life, and the lives of everyone around me, forever."

At the conclusion of the Brisbane program two senior maintenance engineers, Aaron Creagh and James Gunther, gave John a guided tour of the enormous heavy maintenance hangar which housed a Boeing 767 undergoing routine engine maintenance. The giant aircraft was fully enclosed by gantry walkways and heavy-lift overhead cranes. Aaron and James proudly explained the numerous safety features in the maintenance program—special scaffolding to reduce employee heavy lifting, safety jacks to stabilise the aircraft, all power tools driven by compressed air instead of electricity to eliminate sparking, and strict requirements on the use of personal safety equipment. The workplace floor was dominated by several large whiteboards listing which maintenance tasks were underway, what progress was being made and who was responsible.

From the sheer size of the hangar to the intimidating presence of the aircraft and the huge overhead cranes, everything seemed to be done on a massive scale. Following the tour John Wade expressed the belief that Qantas had created safety programs to match and that Teamsafe is now an important addition.

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