



## Eraring Energy WHS Leadership Development Program

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### BACKGROUND

Eraring Energy was a State owned Electricity Generator that operated between 2000 and 2013. The company operated and maintained a range of generating plants that included Australia's largest power station, Eraring Power Station plus hydro power stations and wind farms.

Eraring Power Station had been involved in safety improvement activities since the late 1980's and had obtained a five star rating in the NSCA Five Star Program for seven consecutive years during the 1990's. The organisation had determined that WHS leadership, rather than just WHS compliance, would be their focus.

In the first few years Eraring Energy focused on developing effective systems for all of its locations and this led to ongoing improvements in WHS performance and a reduction in injuries. Inevitably, the return from these improvement activities

diminished and consideration was given as to how to further improve the WHS performance and eliminate the occasional lost time injury that occurred. Eraring Energy then moved to a model that focused on creating 'safe people, safe plant and safe systems' all operating within a leadership framework. It was determined that a program to further enhance safety culture with a focus on teamwork and leadership was an appropriate strategy to pursue. A review of available providers identified Outdoor Insights as a potential provider and they were ultimately selected.



## THE PROCESS

**Initial discussions with Outdoor Insight staff focused on identifying the key WHS learning's that the organisation wanted to share with potential WHS leaders from all levels of the organisation. Outdoor Insights also covered how these learning's could be incorporated into an effective, enjoyable and experiential program that encouraged team work, leadership and, very importantly conversation around WHS.**

It was determined that the program would take mixed groups of managers, team leaders, engineers, technical staff and employees from the organisation and provide them with shared understanding of critical safety concepts around safety culture, risk management, human error and systems. These 'bytes' of safety theory were to be encompassed in an experiential learning framework that was interesting, enjoyable and relevant to all participants.

In practice, mixed groups were identified by the WHS Group from Eraring Energy and invited to participate. The programs were conducted offsite at Eraring Energy's Lake Macquarie Training Centre and ran over two consecutive days. Each group commenced with an introduction and welcome from a senior manager followed by an explanation of how the two days would run. Small information were presented by WHS staff whilst Outdoor Insights staff also provided leadership/ teamwork bytes.

These bytes were mixed with team-based experiential problem solving sessions conducted by Outdoor Insights staff. The experiences were tailored to focus on specifically identified improvement opportunities and were followed up by a feedback session where key issues were discussed.

**Over 100 people participated in each level of the program with three levels conducted over several years. Feedback from participants was consistently positive over the three levels.**

## THE OUTCOME

Good WHS Performance does not come from focusing on just one aspect of the WHS opportunities that exist; rather it requires effort across the range of opportunities.

The WHS leadership program conducted by Outdoor Insights brought together diverse groups of people with different responsibilities and authorities within the organisation to look at 'safe people, safe plant and safe systems.

**The program allowed them to gain a range of perspectives about their role in improving safety within the organisation. This was of enormous value, with everyone becoming more aware that improving safety wasn't just a problem for the maintenance staff. They now:**

- **Understand how to work effectively as a cross functional team to plan and carry out work safely**
- **Work to improve interpersonal communication about WHS issues across all levels of the organisation**
- **Openly discuss issues around WHS systems and their implementation and highlight areas where they contributed to 'safety' problems**
- **Increase their knowledge of safety theory, risk management, leadership, team work and safety culture**

The Outdoor Insights staff also challenged unhelpful and uncooperative behaviour from participants and this led to almost universal participation by the second day of the program and back in the workplace.

Overall the program led to a much better informed workforce with a clearer understanding of why many of the organisations WHS activities were implemented. They operated from a shared understanding of what the organisation was trying to achieve and were more willing to participate in, and challenge, the organisations direction, shared practices and systems. They were also more willing and able to suggest improvements and participate in their introduction. The programs were of great value to Eraring Energy.

