The well-being of our staff is something we take very seriously. Health and Safety comes as the most material topic that Smurfit Kappa has in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Having our products produced in a safe and healthy environment is important to all our stakeholders, especially our employees, their families and the communities where we operate.

Health and Safety in the workplace actually starts at home. It is a mindset. At Smurfit Kappa, we are working towards the ambition of instilling ‘safety first’ thinking, so deep in the company culture that we eventually remove all serious accidents from our operations. Therefore, our Health and Safety focus is ‘Safety First’ and our message is that every Smurfit Kappa employee must return home safely to their families.

This concept applies equally not only to our own employees but also to contractors, sub-contractors and anybody visiting our sites.

Our Health and Safety community has identified six high-risk areas for which specific tools have been developed to promote safety at work. The areas are: Energy Isolation, Contractors and Visitors, Contact with Moving Machinery, People and Vehicle Interactions, Warehouse and Backyards, and Working at Heights.

Mental Health and Safety // UK

“Most of us know of someone with a mental health issue and are aware it can happen to anyone,” says Jackie McDermott, Head of Engagement and Communication at Smurfit Kappa UK, “We all want to support, but often aren’t sure how to.”

Back in 2018, SK UK’s Human Resources and Health and Safety teams worked together to form the SK UK Mental Health and Well-being Strategy. This strategy was a response to some confidential provision from the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). This was needed to provide in-house support. Nigel Elias, UK Health and Safety Environment Manager, says: “Our job is to take care of our colleagues whenever and wherever they get into trouble. We are the last port of call for them, no matter what.”

In 2019, the strategy was launched. It is called Lifeworks, which stands for Life. Work. Wellbeing.

Lifeworks is run by a core team of four people with support from the HR and Safety teams. It focuses on the specific needs of each site. It is a local initiative with a central coordinating team.

One of the key elements is the Mental Health First-Aiders Program, which trains employees to recognize mental health issues and provide support.

“Lifeworks is a really valuable tool for the team, says Jackie. “As an everyday mental health charity, we provide support to people who need it. We work with them to help them understand that it’s not just us, it’s a skill and we can all learn it.”

Lifeline – Communicating Health and Safety // North America

Lifeline is an interactive, two-way communication tool that takes ideas and concerns from workers at sites.

“Smurfit Kappa takes employee safety very seriously – our worldwide initiative, Safety for Life, demonstrates that,” says Greg Macnee, Health, Safety and Environment Director, North America, “but some incident types keep repeating – for example, contact with moving parts. We need a way of making sure employees engage with safety information in a meaningful way, and that it wasn’t just another briefing or report. That’s why the team, led by our HSE Graduate Management Trainees, partnered with the SKNA Communications department to develop Lifeline.”

Lifeline is an interactive, two-way communication tool that takes ideas and concerns from workers at sites, incident trends and SKNA corporate initiatives, and turns them into safety concepts. The bulletin transforms these concepts into eye-catching visual images, in turn, facilitates dialogue between employees and supervisors on the shop floor. “Many people are visual learners,” explains Greg. “A graphic on a large corrugated display can reach many more people – and is much more memorable – than a four-page report.”

The materials are developed by HSE and Communications teams, and each facility discusses how to use them, so they have ownership of the final message. They may decide to put the display in a different area, or feel that a more detailed message requires formal training. Typical topics include hand safety, accident reporting, lockout-tagout procedures and the SKNA Marriot initiative.

“Because the plant-level implementation is as adept as the facility takes it, it’s enthusiastically,” explains Greg. “They find creative ways of displaying and communicating to their employees, giving them still further ownership of the message.”

Lifeline goes out a minimum of four times a year. “Our mission is to be ahead of the curve – to get the message out before it happens,” says Greg. “For the reasons we like Lifeline to be more frequent. Many requests come from plants around the world that help us inform the bulletins that we get much better buy-in that way.”

“Lifeline is one of many SKNA initiatives that has contributed to our cluster’s 44% drop in safety-related incidents from 2018 to 2019. Our cluster is on the right path, but there’s always more work to do to achieve a zero-incident culture.”