Stronger Together: Empowering Safety Through Partnership with Safety Representatives

Introduction

For more than four decades, Safety Representatives have played a central role in supporting health, safety and wellbeing across Eir. Through consultation, collaboration and open communication, they provide an essential link between employees and management, ensuring that concerns are heard, risks are identified, and improvements are continuously driven throughout the organisation.

At the heart of Eir's approach is a simple belief: effective safety representation is built on communication, mutual respect and meaningful conversation. When employees and management work together, sharing knowledge and experience, better safety outcomes are achieved for everyone.

This case study highlights the long-standing success of safety representation within Eir and demonstrates how worker participation has helped create and sustain a positive safety culture across one of Ireland's largest and most geographically dispersed workforces.

Background

Eir has been connecting communities across Ireland for more than 100 years. From the days of Posts & Telegraphs, through Telecom Éireann and Eircom, to today's fibre and 5G networks, Eir has evolved alongside the country it serves. Throughout Eir’s Long history, one commitment has remained constant: ensuring the safety, health and wellbeing of its employees.

Today, Eir employs more than 3,000 people working in cities, towns, villages and communities throughout Ireland. Employees work across a wide range of environments including telecommunications networks, retail stores, offices, exchanges, contact centres, mobile operations and door-to-door sales activities. Each environment presents its own unique hazards and challenges, making effective communication and workforce engagement essential.

Safety Representatives are a key part of this framework. Acting as a bridge between employees and management, they provide a trusted route for raising concerns, sharing knowledge and supporting continuous improvement. Their role helps ensure that the experiences of frontline employees are reflected in health and safety decision-making throughout the organisation.

Eir has maintained certification to ISO 45001 for a number of years. The standard places significant emphasis on leadership, worker consultation and participation, recognising that

meaningful employee involvement is fundamental to creating safer workplaces. Safety Representatives are therefore not simply part of the health and safety system within Eir; they are a vital contributor to its success.

The Role of Safety Representatives

Safety Representatives in Eir are employees who volunteer to represent their colleagues on matters relating to health, safety and wellbeing. While they retain the same responsibilities as all employees under health and safety legislation, they also perform an important additional role by facilitating communication between the workforce and management.

They engage directly with colleagues, identify concerns, participate in workplace inspections, highlight emerging risks and contribute to discussions aimed at improving working conditions. Through regular engagement with employees and management alike, they help ensure that practical frontline experience informs health and safety decisions.

One of the key strengths of the Safety Representative role is the ability to foster conversation. Employees are often more comfortable discussing concerns with a trusted colleague who understands the realities of their work. Through constructive dialogue and mutual respect, Safety Representatives help create an environment where health and safety becomes a shared responsibility rather than simply a compliance requirement.

How Safety Representation Works in Eir

Safety representation within Eir is designed to reflect the company's geographically dispersed workforce. Safety Representatives are elected by their colleagues and act as a liaison between employees and management on all health and safety matters.



Attendees at local Safety Representative Committee meeting

Eir is proud to have one of the largest Safety Representative networks in Ireland, with 55 Safety Representatives operating across nine regional safety committees. These consultative structures have existed for more than 40 years, making them one of the longest-established and most enduring examples of employee safety representation in the country.

The structure enables issues raised at local level to be reviewed and, where necessary, escalated through regional committees to the National Health and Safety Committee (NHSC). This ensures that concerns identified by frontline employees can be considered at the appropriate level and addressed by the relevant business function, whether that be Health and Safety, Facilities, Technical Training, Fleet Management or Senior Leadership.

Importantly, the process is based on partnership and problem-solving. Representatives are encouraged to seek local resolutions where possible, supported by committee members, safety professionals and subject matter experts. Information is then communicated back through the same channels, ensuring employees remain informed throughout the process.



Attendees at Safety Representative Training

To support this structure, Eir provides dedicated training for Safety Representatives through an ongoing three-day training programme covering the role, responsibilities and practical skills outlined in the Health and Safety Authority's Safety Representative Resource Handbook.

To support a large and geographically dispersed workforce, all employees have access to an internal Health, Safety and Wellbeing portal. This portal serves as a central source of information, ensuring employees remain informed and up to date on all Health, Safety and Wellbeing matters. The portal has a dedicated Safety representatives section containing guidance, resources, training materials and information relevant to their role. For a business with a large number of mobile and remote workers, this acts as an important communication hub, helping to ensure consistent messaging and easy access to information. In addition to local and national committee structures, Safety Representatives are supported through regular newsletters, dedicated communications and quarterly Safety Representative Forums. These forums bring representatives from across the organisation together to share experiences, discuss emerging issues, learn from other business units and strengthen collaboration between geographically dispersed teams.



Attendees at Safety Representative Forum Eir HQ

The forums also provide valuable learning opportunities, covering topics such as safety leadership, hazard awareness, driving for work, wellbeing and the evolving role of worker participation in health and safety management.



Attendees at Safety Representative Forum Portlaoise

Safety Representation in Action

The most effective demonstration of the value of Safety Representatives is the positive impact they have on real workplace issues.

Improving PPE Through Employee Feedback

Field technicians raised concerns that disposable gloves originally introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic were not sufficiently durable for the demands of network maintenance activities. The gloves frequently tore, reducing their effectiveness and increasing the potential for exposure to contaminants and minor hand injuries.

Safety Representatives gathered feedback from employees, coordinated field trials of alternative products and escalated the issue through the safety committee structure. Working in partnership with the Health and Safety, Procurement and Logistics teams, a more suitable glove was identified and subsequently introduced nationally.

Outcome: A local concern resulted in a nationwide safety improvement, demonstrating how worker consultation can directly influence safety outcomes while reinforcing employee confidence in the Safety Representative network.

Supporting the Introduction of a Lone Working Solution

The introduction of a new lone working safety solution required engagement with employees across multiple locations and operational areas.

Safety Representatives played a key role in supporting the rollout by communicating directly with colleagues, helping employees understand the new system, providing practical guidance and sharing feedback with the Health and Safety team throughout the implementation process.

Outcome: The successful rollout strengthened protections for lone workers, increased user confidence and demonstrated the importance of trusted local engagement when introducing new safety initiatives.

Identifying an Emerging Hazard

Technicians working on the telecommunications network began reporting unusual holes appearing in wooden poles. Safety Representatives were among the first to be informed and rapidly escalated the issue through both management and Safety Representative channels.

Through the established safety network, photographs and evidence were collected from multiple locations across the country. Working alongside the National Health and Safety Committee and specialist subject matter experts, the cause was identified as woodpecker damage affecting the structural integrity of certain poles.

Outcome: Awareness was quickly raised across the organisation, potentially unsafe poles were identified and replaced, and a national replacement programme was initiated. The incident demonstrated the value of a well-connected Safety Representative network in identifying emerging risks before they result in incidents.

Supporting Success Through Engagement and Participation

Safety Representatives within Eir are not expected to work in isolation. Their success is supported by a broader culture of participation that encourages employees to contribute to health and safety improvements throughout the organisation.

This includes involvement in specialist working groups and sub-committees focused on topics such as lone working, fleet safety and personal protective equipment. In the case of PPE selection, frontline employees and Safety Representatives are actively involved in product trials, providing practical feedback before equipment is approved for wider use.

This approach ensures that decisions are informed by the people who will ultimately use the equipment, processes or systems being introduced. It also helps foster a sense of ownership and engagement among employees, strengthening the overall safety culture.

What Makes Safety Representation Successful in Eir?

While structures, committees and procedures provide the framework, the success of safety representation within Eir is built on something much simpler: communication, consultation and respect.

Discussion and debate on health and safety matters can often involve strongly held views. Employees and managers alike are passionate about workplace safety and wellbeing. What has allowed the system to remain successful for more than 40 years is a shared commitment to constructive engagement and mutual respect.

Consultation is more than simply sharing information. It is a two-way process built on listening, understanding and responding. Effective consultation requires communication, and effective communication requires conversation.

Through ongoing conversations between colleagues, Safety Representatives, managers and health and safety professionals, concerns are identified earlier, solutions are developed collaboratively and safety improvements are implemented more effectively.

Perhaps most importantly, these conversations foster connection. They create an environment where employees feel comfortable raising concerns, sharing ideas and supporting one another. This openness helps strengthen trust and contributes to a positive culture where everyone understands their role in protecting not only themselves, but also their colleagues.

In Summary

The success of safety representation within Eir has been built over many years through genuine partnership between employees and management. While structures and processes are important, the true strength of the system lies in the relationships that support it.

Safety Representatives provide a vital link between frontline employees and decision-makers, ensuring that practical experience and employee knowledge contribute directly to health, safety and wellbeing initiatives across the organisation.

The examples outlined in this case study demonstrate that effective safety representation is far more than a statutory requirement. When properly supported, Safety Representatives become powerful drivers of engagement, hazard identification, continuous improvement and positive safety outcomes.

Safety Representation in Eir

For more than 40 years, Safety Representatives have been an essential part of eir's health and safety journey. Through communication, consultation, respect and meaningful conversation, they continue to play a vital role in helping ensure that everyone goes home safe and well at the end of every working day.

Strong safety cultures are built together, and in Eir, Safety Representatives remain at the heart of that partnership.