HEA Guidance on Method Statements

Introduction

While not required by law, method statements are often used for many construction activities and are proven to be an effective and practical way to help plan, manage and monitor construction work.

They can take account of risks identified by the risk assessment and communicate the safe system of work to those carrying it out. A method statement draws together the information compiled about the various hazards and the ways in which they are to be controlled for any particular job from the conclusions of the risk assessments. They detail the tools, equipment, controls and PPE to use whilst carrying out each step in achieving the task covered by each method statement. Ideally the method statement should also cover the controls and steps to deal with any waste from the task.

A method statement is different to a safe system of work, since it is task focussed and assumes that the organisation's procurement processes and monitoring and auditing processes are appropriate and sufficient. In this way the method statement takes account of the organisation's health and safety organisation including training and assessment of competence procedures.

The method statement describes in a logical sequence exactly how a job is to be carried out in a way that secures health and safety and includes all the control measures. This will allow the job to be properly planned with the appropriate health and safety resources needed for it. It can also provide information for other contractors working at the site about any effects the work will have on them and help the principal contractor develop the construction phase plan for the project.

Risk assessments, together with the method statements derived from them are often abbreviated to RAMS (Risk Assessments and Method Statements). The most effective method statements often include diagrams or photographs to make it clear how work should be carried out.

Observations from NVQ Site Assessments

When carrying out assessments on site for the Highway Electrical NVQs at Level 2 and Level 3, qualified NVQ assessors are assessing against the NVQ national standards, accepted best practice and the employer's RAMS. The aim is to ensure that employees are demonstrating competence and carrying out work safely and consistently both over time and across different employees carrying out the same tasks, in accordance with the employer's RAMS. In so doing, occasionally aspects of the method statements may be called into question.

Areas where method statements may not be achieving their intended purpose include:

- Statements which use language which is not appropriate to the target reader
- Statements which are text only and do not include (safety) symbols, diagrams or images
- Statements which are general and insufficiently specific, allowing potential different interpretations leading to inconsistency and possibly more hazardous approaches
- Statements which use phrases such as "full PPE", "appropriate Temporary Traffic Management (TTM)", "appropriate tools" which may be open to interpretation
- Statements which list the tools, equipment or PPE that should be available, but do not go on to identify what tools, equipment or PPE should be used when

Some examples of where method statements may not be achieving the intended purpose are given below:

Method Statement wording	Possible Issue	Example Possible Solution
"Full PPE must be worn at all times when on site"	• "Full PPE" is open to interpretation – does this mean all of the available PPE all of the time for all activities (e.g. wearing a harness even when not working at height?) • "when on site" is open to interpretation – does his mean inside the works vehicle or on the ground on site • If PPE is stored in the back of the vehicle or even behind the seats, then the employee must get out of the cab and stand on the ground to access the PPE not already being worn e.g. when driving to the site	"High visibility clothing and safety boots must be worn when exiting the works vehicle on site and at all times on site. A Hard hat and gloves must be worn immediately after exiting the vehicle and at all times on site. Other PPE specified as needing to be available, must be worn prior to commencing the relevant step where the PPE is required – as set out in this method statement." Specify what PPE should be worn at each step.
"Appropriate tools and equipment must be used at all times"	• "Appropriate tools and equipment" is open to interpretation • "at all times" is open to interpretation	Specify which tools and equipment should be used at each step
"Ladders should be secured to the structure being accessed"	• This is general and vague.	"Ladders should be used only as a last resort and for short duration works. They must be visually checked before use. The structure to be accessed must be visually assessed and hand tested to ensure it is secure. The ladder must be secured to the structure from ground level as high up the ladder as possible, before ascending it" Specify any other controls such as ladder attachments, harnesses etc.
"A full face visor and electricians gauntlets must be worn in addition to High visibility flame retardant overalls, safety boots and hard hat when pulling or inserting the DNO fuse carrier"	This statement permits the employee to open the column / post / cabinet door without wearing the specified PPE, when it is reasonably foreseeable that a catastrophic failure could occur on opening the door if the conductor insulation has shrunk back	"A full face visor and electricians gauntlets (with overgloves) must be worn in addition to High visibility flame retardant overalls, safety boots and hard hat before opening the column / post / cabinet door and when pulling or inserting the DNO cutout fuse carrier or carrying out any works with the DNO cutout fuse carrier not in position" Specify other controls as required

Six Steps to ensuring the effectiveness of Method Statements

Some or all of the following steps can be taken to assist in ensuring that method statements are both practical and effective:

1. Review the risk assessment first to ensure the method statement is derived from the latest position

2. Draft the method statement using suitable language and (safety) symbols, diagrams or images to add visual interest and aid retention

3. If PPE which must be available is listed, together with any tools or equipment, the required PPE (& tools or equipment) should be detailed at each step. Suitable safety symbols cab be used

4. Issue the draft to a range of employees and talk to them to obtain feedback on the application of method statements and whether it works. This has the added benefit of assisting with both consultation and engagement.

5. The method statement should be checked or audited step by step in practice to ensure it is achievable and can be and is being put into practice on site for a consistently safe approach.

6. Communicate the contents of the method statement, issue it, monitor and audit its use and practicality and review when required