CASE STUDY - COMVITA LIMITED
VEHICLE SAFETY CHALLENGE

THE CHALLENGE

Our vehicle safety challenge started approximately four years ago due to a number of incidents. The risk was not always off-road with a number recorded for incidents during general vehicle movements across New Zealand roads.

Due to an increased number of incidents recorded on-road and despite the increased risk of driving off road our teams appeared to be more risk-aware in our rugged off-road environments than on-road.

OUR APPROACH

Based on an increase in proactive reporting we could identify 3 key areas of focus and set about taking a three-pronged risk based approach focussing on our people, our vehicles and the environments they worked in.

PEOPLE

Our training and development programme focussed on building competency and capability for our beekeepers. In addition to unit standard training, we identified a number of areas based on the plant, equipment and machinery used in the management of an apiary operation.

Vehicle loads including placement and security became a focus along with understanding the 3 different light trailer types which can be towed on a class 1 licence.

Additional training provided our teams with the competency to perform vehicle, trailer and load safety checks prior to starting their journey.

VEHICLES

We assessed the type and style of vehicles in our fleet to ensure we had vehicles capable of performing off-road and were in fact "fit for purpose"

It highlighted vehicles driving off road in the Whanganui/Manawatu region may require a different specification to one operating in the Waikato.

Points considered:

- **Wheels/Tyres** – size (width), tread type, pressure
- **Suspension** – types of suspension - often requiring upgrading due to standard (factory fitted) not designed for loading/towing (despite the vehicle being loaded within the stated load capacity)
- **Gearbox** – manual and automatic, differential lock and gear ratio selection

Using the teams' experience, skills, and local knowledge we determined fit for purpose vehicles, plant, and machinery specific to our apiary operations from Northland to Wanganui.

ENVIRONMENT - OUR WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENTS ARE DIVERSE AND RUGGED, NATURAL MANUKA IS GENERALLY FOUND IN REMOTE SPOTS ON PROPERTIES OFTEN WITH LITTLE IN THE WAY OF TRACKING. TRACKS CAN BE NARROW, OFTEN DIRT OR GRASS COVERED AND LITTLE IN THE WAY OF MAPS TO FOLLOW, AT TIMES HAZARD AND RISK INFORMATION WAS SCARCE. WE DEVELOPED A HAZARD AND RISK PROFILE FOR EACH PROPERTY WHICH WAS AVAILABLE FOR THE BEEKEEPER AT THE FARM GATE ON AN ELECTRONIC DEVICE. THIS ALLOWED THEM TO REVIEW HAZARD AND RISK PROFILES AND ADD/REMOVE HAZARDS TO REFLECT THE CURRENT SITE INFORMATION ENABLING THE PASSING ON OF SITE INFORMATION TO OTHER VISITING MEMBERS OF THE TEAMS.

IMPACT

We have had a considerable reduction of incidents over the last four years since starting this journey. Our beekeepers' competency and capability has increased to the point we now have "in-house" champions providing guidance and support to new members of the team. We have seen a change to a more proactive approach to ensuring the vehicle, plant or piece of equipment are safe to use and remain fit for purpose. Engagement is higher and as a health and safety practitioner working closely with the team, I have gained a clearer understanding and appreciation of our 'work as imagined v as work as done.'

LESSONS LEARNED

Engaging the teams directly led to an increase in the proactive reporting of hazards and near misses which in turn painted a picture of the challenges our beekeepers faced as they travelled on their journeys. It identified opportunities in building our driver's competency, ensuring we had the right plant and equipment for the environment so we were controlling the risk rather than adding to it.

The recording of track information has allowed our land liaison team to work closely with the landowner to reduce risk when managing hives on their property.