

## Preventing industrial accidents by using the Safety Culture Ladder to improve the safety culture

**Accidents occur in all companies and in all industries, including in the food industry. NEN's Safety Culture Ladder helps you identify how you can improve safety and measure the effects.**

High-risk work involves hazards. Examples are working at a height, working with hazardous substances, high temperatures, high-risk equipment or high voltage. Many large companies have dedicated safety officers who focus on improving workplace safety day in, day out. To support this safety focus, some industries and umbrella organisations have developed their own 'safety protocols', i.e. standards for working practice in specific circumstances.

### Safety culture

Safety culture is about the extent to which employees actually comply with these protocols and their own contribution to a safe working environment. The focus is mainly on attitude and behaviour. Culture is an abstract concept and is difficult to measure. A number of years ago, ProRail developed the Safety Culture Ladder (SCL; formerly known as the 'Veiligheidsladder' in Dutch) as a means of defining safety culture and has since transferred it to NEN. The SCL makes it possible to measure safety culture and to identify areas where improvements can be made.

The SCL is a tool for measuring safety awareness, attitude and conduct in companies, with an emphasis on the safety culture. The SCL aims to make companies and their suppliers aware of the importance of working safely and thus promote safe working practices. The greater an organisation's safety awareness is, the higher the step on the ladder awarded to the organisation. The SCL can be applied to all industries.

The SCL focuses on employees' behaviour in practice in terms of attitude and conduct. As it specifically considers a company's culture, attention is paid to more aspects than only systems such as ISO 45001 and VCA (Dutch Safety, Health and Environment Checklist for Contractors). SCL certificates have increasingly become a requirement in tenders and assignments for national and international suppliers.

The safety culture directly impacts the number of industrial accidents. The SCL focuses on the following aspects:

- Employees' intrinsic motivation to work safely;
- Employees' willingness to speak up when they come across any unsafe situations;
- The extent to which the organisation creates openness and encourages discussion about safety;
- The extent to which the issue of safety is supported throughout the organisation;
- The degree of proactiveness concerning safety: do people only act after something happens, or do they take preventative action.

An organisation's safety culture level is indicated by means of steps: 1 to 5. Step 5 is the highest level that can be achieved.

### **Cross-industry**

In order to make the SCL suitable for use in other industries as well, ProRail transferred the scheme to NEN in 2016. NEN, in conjunction with several stakeholders from different companies and industries, facilitates the continuous development of the scheme. Certifying bodies which conduct the SCL audits employ specially trained auditors who can observe and analyse behaviour and culture. They not only examine protocols, but also how people actually behave in the workplace.

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### **Safety culture web tool**

NEN has developed a web tool to enable companies to assess their safety culture themselves. Companies that are considering applying for certification should first take a good look at the internal workings of their organisations to see where things stand as regards their safety culture. The QA manager or safety officer can ask employees at all levels of the organisation to fill in the ready-made questionnaire. Companies which would like to get SCL certification can also have an 'experience audit' conducted to identify areas for improvement.

To the web tool: <https://webtoolscl.nl/nl>

Further information about the Safety Culture Ladder: [www.safetycultureladder.com/en](http://www.safetycultureladder.com/en)

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### **Increasing safety**

Some companies which aspire to increase safety within their organisation have taken the initiative to introduce the SCL themselves, but there are also some major clients who have made the SCL mandatory for their contractors or suppliers. Among them is ProRail, the SCL initiator, as well as grid operator TenneT. Before being able to do certain types of work, their contractors or subcontractors must have achieved a certain step on the SCL. The underlying idea is that this should encourage other companies to make safety their priority. In 2019, the members of GCVB, the Dutch Governance Code for Safety in Construction, arrived at joint agreements to make SCL a mandatory requirement in tender procedures with effect from 2022.

### **International concept**

Since other countries are now showing great interest in the SCL concept, its original Dutch name of 'Veiligheidsladder' has been abandoned and replaced by **Safety Culture Ladder (SCL)**. The scheme is really taking off in Germany. And organisations in Switzerland, Belgium, France and Scandinavia have also taken up the SCL.

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