

CHEP New Zealand country general manager Mike O'Brien has been selected as a finalist in the prestigious [Safeguard New Zealand Workplace Health & Safety Awards 2016](#).

Mike, who featured in [the most recent issue](#) of CILT's magazine, is one of three finalists in the Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum executive leader of the year award. The award "highlights the crucial role leaders play in lifting health and safety performance in their organisations", and provides a way for leaders to share information about what they are doing to improve safety.

The judges zeroed in on four major safety initiatives Mike has spearheaded at CHEP since his appointment in 2012:

- A more than \$3 million upgrade of CHEP's service centre network, including introducing automation and pedestrian segregation, standardising work benches, and providing double handed nail guns – all of which contributed to significant reductions in employee injury rates.
- A focus on engagement and accountability at all levels of the company, including leadership. All senior managers are 'buddied' with a CHEP service centre in relation to safety, and as part of the company-wide Safety Week 2016, each executive conducted a 'Take45' Safety Walk, which included stopping the plant for 45 minutes to identify any potential hazards. Meanwhile, more than 30% of CHEP staff have taken on some form of responsibility relating to health and safety, including appointments to safety committees, roles as manual handling champions, safe behaviour observers or CHEP safe champions and environmental champions.
- Sharing best-practice and building relationships with other New Zealand businesses – for example poultry producer Inghams. As Mars general manager Gerry Lynch said in the nomination: "Mike's dedication to safety leadership... has delivered benefits across multiple industries. For example, he opened the doors at CHEP and invited my management team in for a safety sharing session with his own teams. The information and discussions were invaluable and allowed us to take the next step with our safety journey at Mars."

Mike says companies shouldn't let economic or competition concerns get in the way of companies cooperating over health and safety. "There is no intellectual property when it comes to safety. We all have a responsibility to keep our people safe. Our philosophy is to share our knowledge as widely as possible and ensure meaningful engagement with senior leaders in order to improve safety standards across the industry."

- Long-term involvement in the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC)'s Pacific Island Safety Forum (Tano'a), including sharing insights into safety training for Pacific Island workforces. Mike was also involved in a project to extend CHEP's safety focus to the families and homes of its workforce. Over the last two years, Mike has written to employees' families at their home addresses, providing them with materials covering identification of hazards both at home and on the daily commute to school and kindy. Information was translated into Samoan to ensure it could be understood by CHEP's Samoan workers (about one in three employees), and the package included competitions for children.

These and other initiatives have seen manual handling injuries at CHEP fall from 11 in 2011 to zero last year, and the injury frequency rate come down from 29 in 2011 to four in 2015. Meanwhile, near miss reporting has soared, from 781 to 2513.

Penrose service centre manager Ed Fili says Mike's ability to get engagement from staff has been crucial to the success of safety initiatives. "One of his biggest strengths is his ability to engage with employees across different cultures, applying family values to the company to create a strong safety culture. Mike is truly passionate about keeping our people and our visitors safe."

The other finalists for the health and safety executive leader award are Fletcher Construction CEO Graham Darlow and Fulton Hogan executive manager Jules Fulton. [Award winners will be announced on May 25.](#)