

Six steps to Occupational Health and Safety

This booklet gives basic guidelines for workplace health and safety systems to help industry in NSW comply with the "duty of care" principle outlined in the Occupational Health and Safety Act 1983. It has been produced by WorkCover NSW and includes details of NSW occupational health and safety legislation only. January 1996 WorkCover NSW.

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Health and safety in the workplace

Duty of care

All employers are required under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1983* to accept a duty of care for the health and safety of all people in the workplace. Implementing duty of care requires everyone in the workplace to be aware of potential hazards and take steps to prevent workplace accidents, injuries and illnesses.

The importance of regulations

Regulations are part of the legal framework of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. They are proclaimed by the State Governor on the advice of the State Government.

New regulations are gradually replacing the OHS legislation which existed before 1983. These new regulations provide a basic guideline for workplace health and safety systems to help industry comply with the duty of care principle outlined in the Act. They set the standards to be achieved for the management of particular hazards such as noise, chemicals and machinery and emphasise a process of identifying, assessing and controlling the risks.

Codes of practice

Codes of practice also may be available for health and safety issues in your workplace. They are practical documents which assist in implementing safe workplace procedures. They may also be used by a court as evidence of an employer's failure to implement their duty of care responsibility.

Other resources

Not all your questions about duty of care will be answered in this booklet. You will find additional information about occupational health and safety literature and training courses at the back of this booklet.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act 1983

- a duty of care principle for all employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of employees and others in the workplace
- an obligation for employers to establish that all reasonably practicable measures have been taken to control risks against all possible injuries arising from the workplace
- people in control of workplaces used by non-employees must ensure the health and safety of people who use the premises as a place of work

- the employer's "duty of care" applies to all people in the workplace, including visitors, contractors and others
- a general obligation on manufacturers and suppliers of plant and substances to ensure that their products are not a risk to health and safety when properly used, and to provide information on the correct use and potential hazards associated with the use of the products in the workplace
- a general obligation on employees to take care of others and cooperate with employers in matters of health and safety.

The aim of the Act is to ensure safe workplaces in NSW by:

- defining an employer's duty of care
- stressing workplace participation and consultation by employers and employees
- setting out details in associated regulations, codes of practice and Australian Standards.

A six point approach

A lack of corporate commitment to health and safety will result in OHS remaining a marginalised and insufficiently funded workplace activity. A six point approach has been devised to help you implement effective occupational health and safety systems. This plan can help prevent accidents, incidents, injuries, and work-related ill health. The six points are:

1. Develop an OHS policy and related programs.
2. Set up a consultation mechanism with employees.
3. Establish a training strategy.
4. Establish a hazard identification and workplace assessment process.
5. Develop and implement risk control.
6. Promote, maintain and improve these strategies.

These points are not necessarily in order because all workplaces are different. Some of you may want to repeat some of the steps at different stages. It is important however, that all six steps are included in your occupational health and safety strategy. The six points are outlined in more detail below.

Point one:

Develop an occupational health and safety policy and programs

What to include

Your health and safety policy is a statement of a principle that your organisation upholds. It should state your belief and intent, give a clear direction from management and include the entire organisation. It will also be the basis for any occupational health and safety decisions and action. The policy forms the basis for an OHS program.

In summary, make sure that your policy:

- Shows commitment
- Ensures accountability at all levels
- Encourages co-operation
- is able to be clearly understood by employees

And remember it's important to review and update your policies regularly.

How to start

The easiest way to start is to draft a simple statement of the organisation's commitment to occupational health and safety.

You can then develop the ideas in the statement by talking with employees and any workplace OHS committees. Employees will be more committed to the policy if they're involved in its development.

Finalise the policy after you've talked to everyone involved. Remember the policy should outline the responsibility and accountability of management and supervisors as well as other employees. Contractors should be considered when developing an OHS program.

See Appendix for sample OHS policy.

How to develop an OHS program

Once the organisation has developed a policy, it needs to develop programs to meet the objectives and commitments of the OHS policy.

An OHS program is a planned, coordinated activity so it's best to involve as many people as you can. If your company has an OHS committee, the committee should be involved in program development, with management.

Developing an OHS program is not complicated and not expensive, and it should be developed to meet the specific health and safety needs of the organisation.

You will need to identify the hazards before listing your objectives.

For example if there are manual handling tasks in an organisation, a risk of back injury to employees may be present. The risks need to be identified and assessed and controls implemented. The control strategy may involve redesigning the work system to minimise manual handling, providing mechanical aids and appropriate training.

Consultation is an important step in the development of an OHS program. All people in the workplace affected by a program should be consulted about its development so that the program adequately addresses all issues and has the support of the people involved.

Make sure that your program details new ways, if appropriate, to perform tasks; includes information and training given to managers, supervisors and employees, such as manual handling training for example; details any resources provided and sets out the role of managers and supervisors.

The program should have a timetable for implementation and list those responsible for this. You'll need to monitor each program so that problems are dealt with as they arise. An OHS program is on-going so be sure to evaluate and review each program and make any necessary changes.

Let people know

Advertise the policy and its related programs by promoting it in meetings, seminars, the company newsletter, notice boards and other information sources. Include the policy in the company's induction program.

Point Two:

How to get feedback

Get support and cooperation by letting your employees know what you are doing and why you are doing it. Involve management and employees in your efforts.

Methods of consultation

A consultation process could include:

- establishing a workplace OHS committee
- having meetings, workshops, suggestion boxes, and surveys to let employees know what you are doing
- providing general OHS information such as explaining the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1983* and its implications to your organisation
- making sure the input of all employees is valued
- ensuring management shows strong commitment to the OHS committee
- involving employees in the identification and assessment of hazards, and the development of control strategies and evaluation of controls.

Point three:

Follow it up

Set up a training strategy

Occupational health and safety should be part of your training program rather than being an add-on after the event. Information, instruction and supervision are essential for an effective training strategy and the fulfilment of your "duty of care" requirements.

Everyone in an organisation has an OHS responsibility and therefore requires training. All employees, from senior management level through to shop floor staff, should receive training in "duty of care".

An organisation's OHS training program should involve developing skills to enable all in the workplace to carry out their health and safety responsibilities.

OHS training does not just involve specific hazard training, OHS is part of all workplace training, just as OHS is an integral part of day-to-day management.

Health and safety should be included in:

- induction training
- supervisor and management training
- on-the-job training, as well as
- specific hazard training
- work procedures and skills training
- emergency procedure training
- first aid training.

An effective training program can be developed through:

- analysing work tasks and assessing the knowledge or skill level required for these tasks
- planning and conducting appropriate training and skill development for the safe performance of all work tasks
- planning and conducting training in these safe systems of work
- including OHS principles in employee induction programs
- planning and conducting training in emergency procedures
- evaluating your training program to monitor its effectiveness
- on-the-job training of employees including apprentices

Point four:

A major feature of an OHS program will involve identification and assessment of workplace hazards.

Hazard identification

A hazard is anything with the potential to harm life, health or property. As hazards are the prime identifiable cause of occupational health and safety problems, controlling the risk arising from them offers managers the greatest area of opportunity for reducing injury and illness in the workplace.

Hazards arise from the workplace environment, the use of plant and substances in the workplace, poor work design, inappropriate management systems and procedures, and human behaviour. A set of procedures can be used in your organisation to enable workplace hazards to be identified.

a. Safety audit

This is a systematic and periodic inspection of the workplace to evaluate the effectiveness of the organisation's health and safety system. The audit may be conducted by a safety consultant or workplace OHS professionals such as safety officers. An audit usually contains a written report for management and is usually referred to any OHS committee.

b. Workplace inspections

These are regular inspections of the workplace by managers, supervisors and safety committee members to determine by observation what hazards exist in the workplace. Inspections involve consultation with supervisors and employees and a report to management and/or the safety committee.

c. Accident investigations

Many workplaces have a set of procedures for investigating and reporting on accidents (and near hits) to identify the hazards that contributed to the incident. Many accidents that involve "lost time" should be reported to the WorkCover Authority. Details of reporting requirements are on the Accident Report form which is available from all WorkCover offices.

d. Consultation

Employees are often more aware of hazards and the possible ways of controlling them, than management. Consulting employees can improve the assessment process as well as improving cooperation with control measures eventually put in place. If you have an OHS Committee, make sure it's accessible to everyone.

e. Injury and illness records

workplaces are required to keep records of injuries and illness. Many workplaces also generate reports and statistics based on workers' compensation claims. These statistics can be analysed to show the presence of hazards in the workplace. WorkCover has adopted AS 1885.1 Workplace injury and disease recording standard as a Code of practice, giving advice on how to monitor and record workplace injury and illness.

f. Health and environmental monitoring

As with the OHS audits, monitoring may be done by OHS consultants or safety officers to provide technical advice about suspected problems. Monitoring may show that a substance or process is a hazard and its severity. In this way, monitoring is associated both with hazard identification and workplace assessment and evaluation. A workplace hazard can also be brought to management's notice outside the routine investigating and reporting systems.

g. Complaints

Many workplace hazards are brought to the attention of a supervisor or manager through a complaint being made by an employee. Complaints should be taken seriously and passed to the appropriate person for prompt action, not left to create an industrial problem.

h. Observation

A supervisor, manager or OHS committee member, as part of his or her normal duties, may observe a workplace hazard. Part of the OHS program includes clearly defining who is responsible for the above activities and how the information is processed and analysed.

Hazard assessment

Once hazards have been identified, you can then assess their significance. The level of significance will determine the priority assigned to its elimination or control. There are many types of hazards; physical, chemical and biological for example, and methods for assessing them will differ. A few general points need to be considered, however, when assessing hazards.

a. More than one cause

There may well be a number of factors which contribute to the probability and degree of injury or illness for a particular hazard. For example, a chemical may be toxic if split and absorbed through the skin; and a worker may not have been trained in safe clean-up procedures.

b. Exposure

The significance of the risk of injury or illness may be affected by the level of a worker's exposure to a hazard. For example, the hazard posed by exposure to a solvent increases with the frequency and duration of exposure.

c. Severity

This concerns the extent of the injury or degree of harm which might be caused by a hazard. A severe effect may even include death, permanent disability or an illness such as cancer or hepatitis. Some examples are electrical hazards and machinery, chemicals such as acids, and dust particles such as asbestos.

d. Human differences

Hazards need to be assessed in terms of the individual or groups of employees who are exposed to them. Their skills, experience, training and physical capabilities must be taken into account. The risk from manual handling hazards can be increased by physical limitations and lack of experience in dealing with the hazard.

Some examples are:

Allergies: some workers experience allergic reactions when exposed to certain chemicals or airborne particles.

plant controls: fixed plant controls might not be manipulated in a totally safe manner by all employees because of the difference of size and strength between individuals, or by left handed operators using machines designed for right handers.

Performance standards: a changing workforce can significantly affect such factors as experience, age and size of workers and these need to be taken into account in setting or modifying performance standards.

The assessment of hazards can be a complex task and can involve expert technical analysis such as air analysis, and exposure level readings. In many cases it may require the involvement of consultants to undertake such assessments.

Work out priorities The purpose of workplace hazard assessment is to determine priorities in hazard control. Effective hazard control involves a commitment of human, financial and physical resources. As these are limited, your organisation has to allocate them on its assessment of priorities. Any hazard assessment process should determine priorities based on the frequency and severity of injury or illness posed by the hazard.

Use the table below to prioritise the identified hazards.

The numbers show how important it is to do something:

1 (extremely important) through to 6 (least important).

For each hazard think about:

How **severely** it could hurt someone ?

| How likely is it to hurt someone ? | KILL OR DISABLE | SEVERAL DAYS OFF WORK | FIRST AID |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Very likely – could happen regularly | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Likely – could happen occasionally | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Unlikely – could happen, but only rarely | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Very unlikely – could happen, but probably never will | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Point five:

Develop and implement risk control strategies

Now that the hazards have been identified and assessed, you need to implement a strategy to eliminate or reduce the exposure to the risk.

The "hierarchy of control" will help you decide the best way to control risks. The hierarchy of control ranks control strategies from the most effective to the least effective strategy. Not all types of strategies will be practicable and more than one type of strategy may be needed to achieve the best protection, for example ventilation and gloves (PPE).

Hierarchy of control

Engineering Controls

1. DESIGN. Try to ensure that hazards are 'designed out' when new materials, equipment and work systems are being planned for the workplace.
2. REMOVE the hazard or substitute less hazardous materials, equipment or substances.
3. ADOPT A SAFER PROCESS. Alterations to tools, equipment or work systems can often make them much safer.
4. ENCLOSE OR ISOLATE THE HAZARD through the use of guards or remote handling techniques.
5. PROVIDE EFFECTIVE VENTILATION through local or general exhaust ventilation systems.

Administrative Controls

6. ESTABLISH appropriate ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES such as:
 - job rotation to reduce exposure or boredom; or timing the job so that fewer workers are exposed
 - routine maintenance and housekeeping procedures
 - training on hazards and correct work procedures.

Personal Protective Equipment

7. PROVIDE suitable and properly maintained PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT and training in its use.

Note that PPE does not address the hazard.

Once you have decided on a control strategy or a combination strategy eg replace toxic chemicals with less hazardous chemicals and implement safer work procedures and PPE to minimise exposure to risk, ensure that all employees are informed and consulted.

Point six:

Review your programs

Promote, maintain and improve strategies

It's important to promote, maintain and keep improving your OHS programs and procedures. Review your programs regularly. Promotion and evaluation of programs is essential for ongoing effectiveness of your OHS policy and programs. Program review should include the OHS committee.

Strategies for maintaining your OHS program could include:

- communicating with people in the workplace about OHS activities including the success of control strategies
- making sure that OHS is integrated into all management procedures eg. planning, budgeting, performance objectives
- evaluating the success of the control strategies, such as an injury review, accidents and "near miss" reports and records
- evaluating and reviewing your education and training programs
- seek advice from employees to check whether they feel the control strategies are working and whether there are any problems with the OHS programs, eg check whether the control strategies have created new problems of their own
- strong commitment to OHS from management.

For more information:

For more information on the Occupational Health & Safety Act 1983, telephone WorkCover's information line on 131050. Accident report forms are available from your nearest WorkCover office.

If you want training in OHS, contact the OHS Education Unit WorkCover Authority, level 4, 400 Kent Street, Sydney, NSW 2000, telephone (02) 9370 5290.

Resources

The WorkCover Bookshop has a large range of occupational health and safety publications, posters, stickers, codes of practice, certification guides, videos and information on floppy disks.

Phone the publication information line on (02) 9370 5303 for orders or your free copy of the WorkCover Bookshop Catalogue.

Appendix

Sample Occupational Health and Safety Policy

General Policy

The occupational health and safety of all persons employed within the organisation and those visiting the organisation is considered to be of the utmost importance.

Resources in line with the importance attached to occupational health and safety will be made available to comply with all relevant Acts and Regulations and to ensure that the workplace is safe and without risk to health.

Management's Responsibility

The promotion and maintenance of occupational health and safety is primarily the responsibility of management. Management at all levels is required to contribute to the health and safety of all persons in the workplace.

Occupational Health and Safety Committees

The Occupational Health and Safety Workplace Committee will try to reach consensus on all aspects of the organisation's OH & S policy and program. To this end each committee meeting will be attended, as often as possible, by the employer's representative who has the necessary power to authorise action in response to the committee's recommendations.

Occupational Health and Safety Program

In order to implement the general provisions of this policy, a program of activities and procedures will be set up, continually updated and effectively carried out. The program will relate to all aspects of occupational health and safety including:

- OH&S training and education
- work design, workplace design and standard work methods
- changes to work methods and practice, including those associated with technological change
- safety rules, including penalties
- emergency procedures and drills
- provision of OH & S equipment, services and facilities
- workplace inspections and evaluations
- reporting and recording of incidents, accidents, injuries and illnesses and provision of information to employees
- contractors and sub-contractors

Specific Responsibilities

a) Managers

Each manager is required to ensure that this policy and the OH&S program are effectively implemented in their areas of control, and to support supervisors and hold them accountable for their specific responsibilities.

b) Supervisors

Each first-line supervisor is responsible, and will be held accountable, for taking all practical measures to ensure: that the workplace under their control is safe and without risks to health; and that the behaviour of all persons in the workplace is safe and without risks to health.

More specifically:

1. the supervisor will always be held accountable for detecting any unsafe or unhealthy conditions or behaviour;
2. if the supervisor does not have the necessary authority to fix a problem, they will be held accountable for reporting the matter promptly together with any recommendations for remedial action to a supervisor or manager who does have the necessary authority.

c) Managers and Supervisors

The supervisor or manager who has the necessary authority will be held accountable for taking prompt remedial action to eliminate any unsafe or unhealthy conditions or behaviour.

d) Employees

All employees are required to cooperate with the OH&S policy and programs to ensure their own health and safety and the health and safety of others in the workplace.

e) Contractors and Sub-contractors

All contractors and sub-contractors engaged to perform work on the organisation's premises or locations are required, as part of their contract, to comply with the occupational health and safety policies, procedures and programs of the organisation and to observe directions on health and safety from designated officers of the organisation. Failure to comply or observe a direction will be considered a breach of the contract and sufficient grounds for termination of the contract.