

THE MANAGEMENT OF WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE COMMONWEALTH JURISDICTION

Establishing a work health and
safety management system



Australian Government

Comcare

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INTRODUCTION

Most organisations have systems to manage a range of business issues, such as finance, human resources, and information. While these are important issues for any organisation, so too is the effective management of workplace health and safety (WHS).

In order to promote WHS in your organisation, it is essential that you establish a formalised WHS system and, as much as possible, integrate this into your daily business operations. This formalised system is often referred to as a work health and safety management system.

A WHS management system is that part of the overall management system which includes organisational structure, planning activities, responsibilities, practices, procedures, processes and resources for developing, implementing, achieving, reviewing and maintaining the WHS policy, and so to managing the WHS risks associated with the business or undertaking of the organisation.

While setting up a WHS management system may at first seem daunting, it should not be a difficult process. This publication leads you through the development of a basic WHS management system suitable for both large and small organisations, all work environments, and for the prevention of work-related injury and disease.

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This guide has been developed to help you meet your responsibilities under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth) (WHS Act) as a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU). It will enable you to establish or maintain an effective WHS management system in your workplace. The guide includes advice on integrating a WHS management system into every aspect of your organisation's core business.

WHAT IS CONTAINED IN THIS GUIDE

This guide contains information on:

- > the benefits of having a WHS management system
- > the features of an effective WHS management system
- > managing a safe and healthy workplace.

THE BENEFITS OF HAVING A WHS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Investing in an effective WHS management system should reduce workplace illness and injury, minimise the costs associated with workplace accidents, and reduce the likelihood of prosecution for breaches of WHS laws. Commonwealth PCBUs have certain legislative obligations under the WHS Act. They have a primary duty of care to ensure the health and safety of their workers and other persons at work.

Section 19 of the WHS Act states that a PCBU must ensure—so far as is reasonably practicable—the health and safety of workers while at work in the business or undertaking. They must also ensure that the health and safety of other persons is not put at risk from work carried out as part of the business or undertaking.

An effective WHS management system will assist the PCBU to achieve these legislative obligations.

THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF A WHS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

WHS management is comprised of five principles that, if followed, will enable an organisation to integrate WHS into its management system. These five general principles are:

1. Commitment
2. Planning
3. Implementation
4. Measurement and evaluation
5. Review and improvement

1. COMMITMENT

Senior management leadership and commitment is an important principle of WHS risk management, and is required to successfully implement a WHS management system.

Under the WHS Act, senior managers/executives who are involved in making decisions that affect the whole, or a substantial part, of a business or undertaking are referred to as 'officers'. The scope of an officer's duty is directly related to the influential nature of their position within the organisation. The intention of this duty is to ensure effective engagement and leadership in WHS management and performance.

Although an organisation may have several managers across various departments, groups or teams, not all of these people are considered to be officers under the WHS Act. Managers (including human resource managers), supervisors and WHS advisors are not considered officers as they do not generally participate in making key decisions on how the PCBU operates. These managers usually assist the officers by providing information and advice, and by implementing the decisions.

Officers of a PCBU must exercise 'due diligence' to ensure that the business or undertaking complies with health and safety duties. An outward display of leadership commitment to establishing, managing and improving WHS management systems is an important aspect of fulfilling this duty.

Section 27 of the WHS Act states that in exercising 'due diligence' an officer must take reasonable steps to:

- > acquire and keep up-to-date knowledge of work health and safety matters
- > gain an understanding of the hazards and risks associated with the nature of the operations
- > ensure that the business or undertaking has appropriate resources and processes to enable risks to health and safety arising from work carried out as part of the business or undertaking to be eliminated or minimised
- > ensure that the business or undertaking has appropriate processes for receiving and considering information about incidents, hazards and risks and responding in a timely way
- > ensure that the business or undertaking implements processes for complying with its duties and obligations.

Having an effective WHS management system in place will assist officers to meet their obligations under the WHS Act.

Senior management must be willing to participate in an initial review of the organisation's current WHS position. They should also be involved in subsequent reviews of WHS. This will provide a clear picture of the organisation's WHS performance over the last few years, including:

- > hot-spots, or areas in the organisation that have a higher incidence of injuries
- > injury trends (for example, stress or hazardous manual tasks)
- > organisational hazards and methods of risk assessment/control
- > identification of gaps in current WHS management systems
- > compliance with legislative requirements.

One of the most visible signs of an organisation's commitment to actively managing WHS is through workplace arrangements in the form of policies and procedures. These arrangements should outline the whole organisation's WHS responsibilities and commitment to WHS improvement. Additionally, they should be tailored to the organisation by linking directly to corporate objectives and values.

Workplace arrangements should be developed in consultation with workers and/or worker representatives. They should include provisions for consultation and communication on WHS matters between the PCBU, workers and/or worker representatives.

Although the term 'health and safety management arrangements (HSMAs)' and the legislative requirements that accompany this process are no longer included under WHS legislation, this doesn't mean that the fundamental concepts of this process are no longer valid. If your organisation already has established arrangements for communication and consultation on WHS that suit the workplace then you should monitor and review these in consultation with HSRs and workers to ensure that they continue to be effective and meet requirements of the current WHS laws.

This may involve adapting your existing HSMAs to reflect the consultative arrangements required by WHS laws. In turn this will ensure that your organisation continues to move towards best practice in preventing work-related injuries and illnesses.

2. PLANNING

Assessing the results of an initial WHS review is the first step in planning. Once assessed, senior management should plan realistic objectives and targets that fulfill the organisation's corporate goals and vision. These targets and objectives should be measurable using performance indicators.

For example: An organisation sets an objective 'to eliminate manual task injuries in the workplace'. The target is to record 'nil injuries in the financial year' and the performance indicator is 'the percentage of manual task injuries recorded in the financial year'. This concept can easily be applied across a group, division or the organisation as a whole.

Plans should include:

- > the financial and human resources allocated to achieving the objectives and targets
- > strategies for including the WHS management system in mainstream corporate/business plans
- > strategies for informing workers when the organisation's WHS management system is implemented or improved
- > particulars of any risk management or WHS audit systems that are in place or will be implemented in core business activities
- > the activities necessary to bring the organisation to full compliance with all relevant legislation
- > procedures for regularly reviewing the WHS management system
- > consultation arrangements for developing or varying WHS systems to fully inform workers and ensure that their views are represented.

Note: The level and complexity of planning will vary amongst organisations depending on the nature of the organisation, its size and risk profile

3. IMPLEMENTATION

The effectiveness of a WHS management system will depend on how successfully it has been implemented and integrated into the organisation's daily business operations.

As mentioned in the planning stage, it is important for appropriate levels of human and financial resources to be dedicated to the project. People allocated to the project must understand and support the objectives of the WHS management system.

Communication and consultation strategies should be put in place so that all workers understand their responsibilities and the necessity of implementing an effective WHS management system. These strategies may include:

- > information seminars introduced by the CEO and presented by appropriate members of the senior management team
- > preparing brochures or booklets detailing the health and safety workplace arrangements
- > including information in any internal newsletters or information emails circulated to workers
- > placing information on bulletin boards or posting signs in prominent areas of the building
- > consultative forums involving workers, worker representatives and unions—this promotes worker ownership and encourages smoother implementation of WHS management systems.

Integration into mainstream business activities and policies, actions could include:

- > make WHS a leading agenda item at senior management meetings, and worker meetings
- > make WHS awareness training compulsory for all new inductees, with half-day refresher courses for all workers on a yearly basis
- > provide specific competency-based training for workers involved in hazardous situations on a regular basis (for example, hazardous chemical usage)
- > require health and safety committee members to undergo training so that they become familiar with the organisation's hazard identification, risk assessment and risk control procedures
- > engage a WHS Advisor or Workplace Health Officer who is responsible for monitoring the organisation's WHS performance and reporting to the most senior level
- > include WHS requirements in any contract for the purchase of goods and services and contracts of employment
- > prepare a policy and provide appropriate resources for implementing an 'emergency control organisation' that contains first aid officers, fire wardens, and security personnel or systems.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive—there are many methods you can use to integrate WHS into other management systems in your workplace.

When integrating WHS into management systems you should take care to develop policies and procedures for the range of work classifications and workplaces in your organisation. For example, your work population may include clerical/management workers, maintenance workers, plant operators, or workers involved with hazardous chemicals. Make sure workers receive training appropriate to the work they are required to undertake and their responsibilities.

It is worth noting that there are additional resources you can access when integrating WHS into management systems. Consider internal workers first—you may have workers studying WHS who would like to be involved in the process. There may be scope for workers interested in project management, or workers at the middle management level, to be involved as well.

There is also a wide range of external help available, such as:

- > Comcare's health and safety helpdesk (whs.help@comcare.gov.au)
- > publications, tools and guidance produced by Comcare
- > other agencies which have gone through the same process
- > people within your local WHS network
- > consultants, suppliers or professional trainers
- > associations, such as your local Chamber of Commerce
- > worker associations
- > universities or students who may assist you from a research perspective, which is mutually advantageous.

4. MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

Once a WHS management system is put in place, it is necessary to measure and evaluate performance so the organisation can monitor the effectiveness of the system, and make adjustments to ensure a process of continuous improvement.

Procedures for measurement and evaluation of the system should be developed in the planning stage. These procedures should provide information on:

- > persons responsible for monitoring and evaluation
- > systems developed for measuring WHS performance—for example, a WHS management information system, which records the number of incidents and accidents, lost-time injury frequency rates, number of hazard inspections and their results per year (Comcare has a Customer Information System (CIS) which is available to key agency personnel at no cost—this may be particularly useful for agencies requiring regular reports, and is available by contacting Comcare)
- > testing methods specific to your agency—for example, testing the emergency control organisation via a fire drill, or personal monitoring for workers involved in hazardous operations
- > audit tools to be used, such as WHS-specific audit tools or internally developed audit methods.

The audit of a WHS management system will often identify a gap between the effectiveness of the current system and what would be considered a 'best practice' system. For this reason, it is necessary to implement a system which will allow corrective action to be taken where required. Corrective action may be necessary to fix a gap in the system as a preventative measure following evaluation. It may also be used as a reactive measure following an incident in the workplace. It is preferable that any corrective action taken is preventative and proactive.

Preventative action may result from workplace inspections, discussion with operational workers, testing of hazardous operations, or other measurement and evaluation exercises. Your organisation has the opportunity at this stage to implement changes in the WHS management system that may prevent the future injury, illness or even death of a worker. Much progress in workplace health and safety has resulted from reactive measures following an incident. Generally, these incidents are investigated in order to find out what happened and what can be done to control any risk of future exposure to the hazard. During any investigation corrective action should be identified so that the incident does not recur, or if it does, then as a minimum the appropriate measures will have been put in place to minimise any risk to the health or safety of workers involved.

5. REVIEW AND IMPROVEMENT

It is important to regularly review an organisation's WHS management system. With changes in work systems, legislation, technology, organisational structure, chemicals, machinery and plant, it is vital that PCBUs remain aware of changes within their work environment and ensure that the health and safety of workers is not compromised as a result of these changes.

It is easy to become complacent following the introduction of a WHS management system. This is the reason ongoing review and improvement is so important—to ensure that WHS performance is continuously improved wherever possible.

Review of WHS management systems may be carried out at any stage following integration with your core business activities, and can take many forms. For example:

- > a full annual audit of the effectiveness of the system
- > regular monthly reviews following analysis of objectives, targets and performance indicators
- > a review following hazard inspections
- > during audit of a particular group, division or branch (for example, an ANAO or internal audit)
- > as a feedback mechanism from workers following training
- > following an investigation into an incident or accident.

Reviewing your WHS management system should identify:

- > reasons why WHS performance may be below the organisation's targets and objectives
- > any instances of non-compliance with legislative requirements
- > opportunities to improve the organisation's WHS performance by adjusting the WHS management system
- > changes necessary as a result of the introduction of new technology, plant, equipment, chemicals or work practices
- > the effectiveness of any changes made.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

While this guide provides an overview of WHS matters, it should not be considered as the only source of information. You can also refer to:

- > the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*
- > approved codes of practice
- > agency-specific documents which detail appropriate practices and procedures for the effective management of WHS at the workplace, for example:
 - WHS policies, procedures and agreements
 - WHS hazard policies and procedures, including prevention strategies aimed at reducing the incidence of body stressing or manual task injuries
- > publications produced by Comcare which may be relevant to your requirements available at www.comcare.gov.au
- > guidance and fact sheets produced by Safe Work Australia which may be relevant to your requirements available at www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au
- > AS/NZS 4801:2001 Occupational Health and Safety Management systems—specification with guidance for use
- > AS/NZS 4804:2001 Occupational Health and Safety Management systems—general guidelines and principles, systems and supporting techniques
- > your organisation's WHS Manager and/or Advisor
- > your organisation's health and safety policies and procedures.

CONTACT DETAILS

You can contact Comcare for general enquiries Monday to Friday—8.30 am to 5.00 pm AEST.

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