

Work Health and Safety Harmonisation

Mark Werman



To prepare for new Work Health and Safety laws on 1 January 2012

Background

On 1 January 2012 Australia will be adopting new work health and safety laws, including a Work Health and Safety Act, Regulations and Codes of Practice.

The changes result from the national harmonisation of Australia's work health and safety laws. All states, territories and the Commonwealth will be adopting the same laws. Therefore, if you are currently complying with your work health and safety obligations, you are well-placed to do so under the new laws.

The new laws will focus on protecting Australians at work and cut red tape for businesses that operate across state borders.

The introduction of a new work health and safety framework is the perfect time for you to review your safety systems and to ensure workplace health and safety is a high priority. The model work health and safety bill is available from the Safe Work Australia website.

There are, however, a few steps that you can take now to start preparing for the new laws.

To ensure your business is ready for the new laws:

- 1 Be proactive in your approach to workplace health and safety. This could include:
 - > Reviewing your current work health and safety policies, procedures and risk management strategies and measures
 - > Allocate resources and time in your budget and plans for the 2011/2012 year to train new and retrain existing health and safety representatives
 - > Engage a work health and safety professional to see what systems you can put in place to make your business safer
 - > Talk to your workers and health and safety representatives about the new laws
 - > If your existing safety systems are effective, don't discard them – the new laws will resemble what you are currently using.
- 2 Understand your rights, obligations and duties under the model laws by:
 - > Viewing the model legislation on the Safe Work Australia website at safeworkaustralia.gov.au
 - > Keeping an eye on your state WorkCover/WorkSafe website for ongoing updates and information on the new laws.
- 3 Make sure you know what the changes will mean for your workplace. Become familiar with your duties as a 'person conducting a business or undertaking' or officer, the new arrangements for health and safety representatives and entry permit holders as well as changes to penalties. The new laws will be enforced from 1 January 2012, so now is a good time to view the laws on the Safe Work Australia website.
- 4 Attend an information session on the new laws.

Remember that your State's current workplace health and safety laws will continue to apply until 1 January 2012 when the new laws are scheduled to commence.

Health and Safety tips

These are some steps you can take now to address work health and safety. Every business is unique, and some tips might not apply to your workplace. Likewise, some duties, like providing a safe workplace and training and supervision, apply in all workplaces, regardless of size. Prior to the new laws coming into effect on 1 January 2012, review all your work health and safety policies and procedures to ensure they comply.

For small business

These tips provide a great start to make your workplace safer. They're the result of the 12 OHS hazards that OHS inspectors commonly see during their visits to small businesses.

- 1 **Fire** Ensure extinguishers are in place, maintained and clearly marked for type of fire. All fire exits are clear and exit signs illuminated.
- 2 **Electrical** Plugs, sockets, switches are in good condition. Extension cords are tested and tagged. Floors are clear. Safety switches are hardwired into electrical switchboards.
- 3 **Chemical** Workplace chemicals register and Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) are current. Chemicals are handled and stored to MSDS guidelines, and employees who use chemicals are trained in their safe use.
- 4 **Slips, trips and falls** Work areas are kept clean, uncluttered and well lit. Employees wear suitable footwear.
- 5 **Storage and racking** Racking systems are stable and in good condition, and they display and comply with the specified Safe Working Load. Safe access is provided to storage areas.
- 6 **Noise** Eliminate or reduce noise from loud processes or equipment. Where applicable, hearing protection is available and signage indicates it must be worn.
- 7 **Forklifts** Forklift operators have a current licence and always wear a seatbelt. Forklifts are checked daily and regularly maintained. Traffic management plans and signage are present, and pedestrians are physically separated as much as possible.
- 8 **Heights** Mezzanine floors have safe access and fall protection, handrails are secure and steps are well maintained, platform ladders are industrial grade and comply with standards.
- 9 **Manual handling** Hazardous manual handling is eliminated. Adequate space is provided for work or storage and trolleys are used to move items. The work area is between knee and shoulder height, and is close to the worker's body.
- 10 **First aid** A first aid box is readily available and appropriately stocked. Qualified first aid staff are available and known to staff. Sufficient amenities are present for all staff.
- 11 **Asbestos** All asbestos is correctly labelled and an asbestos register is prepared and up to date. Asbestos in poor condition has been removed by a licensed asbestos removalist.
- 12 **Machinery** Safe access to machinery and equipment is provided. Moving parts cannot strike or reach people, and other hazards associated with machinery such as fumes, chemicals and noise have been assessed.

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For medium and large businesses

There are seven pillars of safety all medium and large employers should consider as part of a framework for ensuring ongoing, systematic and effective management of workplace health and safety matters. They are:

1 Senior management roles and accountability

Clear top down responsibility and KPIs for OHS/Return to Work, supplemented with suitably qualified, professional advice.

2 Strategic planning

A commitment to health and safety (and assisting workers to return to the workplace after injury) are part of the organisation's business plan.

3 Recording and reporting

Health and safety and injury claims/premium performance data is recorded and reported at director level.

4 Training and supervision

Managers and supervisors understand their OHS role and responsibilities and potential impacts of poor performance.

5 Consultation

Regular, inclusive discussion with relevant staff on health and safety and return to work improvements.

6 Hazard management

Hazards are identified and risks controlled in a systematic way using the hierarchy of control.

7 Injury management

All relevant staff proactively involved and coordinated by a suitably appropriately senior and competent Return to Work Coordinator.



Mark Werman is managing director of Wentworth Advantage.
For more information please contact Wentworth Advantage on 02 8448 3200
or support@myadvantage.com.au

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