

## WELCOME

2012 is well underway. Your operations are in full swing as you look to assess your performance against your 2011-12 EOFY targets and start to plan how you will continue to improve your health and safety performance in 2012-13 and beyond.

For many businesses and workers, this period is seen as stressful. EOFY targets, reporting and planning for the year ahead becomes a significant focus. In this edition of Building a Safe Workplace Together our consultants have placed a focus on looking into workplace stressors.

## OVERVIEW

- What's new?
- What have we been up too so far in 2012
- The hidden hazards with workplace change... managing workplace stressors.
- Does your business have working fathers?
- Are you Training for Compliance or Training for Safety?
- Workers Compensation – Improving your business's bottom line by actively managing your Premium spend
- OHS Harmonisation Update

## WHAT'S NEW?

Action OHS Consulting has recently established an OHS support line aimed at providing you with prompt health and safety guidance and support. If you would like further information regarding this service, or have any questions regarding how this service may support your business, send an email to [info@actionohs.com.au](mailto:info@actionohs.com.au).

## WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TOO SO FAR IN 2012?

2012 has seen Action OHS Consulting continue to help a number of our clients build safer workplaces. Some of the projects and outcomes that we have found interesting, and that which may interest you include:

- After implementing a dust monitoring program, which reviewed individual workers dust exposure when operating cutting saws; it was found that dust exposure was within the OEL for experienced operators when cutting the softwood used on-site. Interestingly, however, the OEL was exceeded for:
  - Inexperienced operators
  - When workers undertook housekeeping activities.
- Controls have since been identified and implemented for these variations to the task. What tasks take place in your workplace, that may lead to hazard exposure changing as a result of experience, or activities attached to the task?
- Following the completion of OHS Harmonisation Due Diligence reviews, we continue to find that:
  - Officers and Directors have not been briefed on their positive due diligence duty.
  - Workplaces do not have current OHS Hazard/Risk Register.
- We continue to complete ergonomic/workstation assessments. Most workers appear to be unaware at what height they need to set their chair. It's no surprise then, that in the weeks after our assessment we are getting reports about reductions in neck, shoulder and upper back pain!
- We have developed an ergonomics train the trainer program. This alternative approach gives selected people within an organisation a higher level of skill so that they can assist others set up ergonomic work areas! This removes the need to involve external consultants for every workstation setup query – letting you allocate your budget into other areas that will improve workplace safety.
- We have developed and implemented a Pre-Start Warm Up Program in the form of posters that look great! Our client's workers were super engaged at their briefing session!



## THE HIDDEN HAZARDS WITH WORKPLACE CHANGE...MANAGING WORKPLACE STRESSORS

The first part of this year has seen a number of businesses publicly restructure operations. This has led to reductions in worker numbers. Blue collar examples have included Ford and Toyota and more recently Qantas; whilst white collar industries have not escaped, with both Westpac and ANZ moving elements of their operations overseas.

When speaking with our clients, the health and safety impacts of similar changes are not considered until prompted. Currently, work-related stress is the second most common compensated illness/injury in Australia, and incurs a whopping median claims cost of \$16,500 per claim. When considering the indirect cost to your business, it has been suggested that one of these claims can set your business back \$75,000 per claim. It makes sense for work-related stress to be on the radar of every business.

The right level of workplace stress will assist your workers to stay focused, energetic, and alert. Get it wrong; stress is likely to hamper work performance. Stress may impact your workers' health, productivity, quality of work, or, damage their working relationships. Work-related stress arises where work demands exceed a person's capacity and capability to cope. This may be seen through increased nervousness, tension, strain, anxiety and depression. The diagram to the right describes how a worker's performance is related to their level of stress.

Workplace change, restructure and the EOFY are known workplace stressors; therefore, it is important that OHS is included when your business discusses how these situations should be managed. As part of your business's duty to consult, these discussions (when appropriate) should be extended to your Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs).

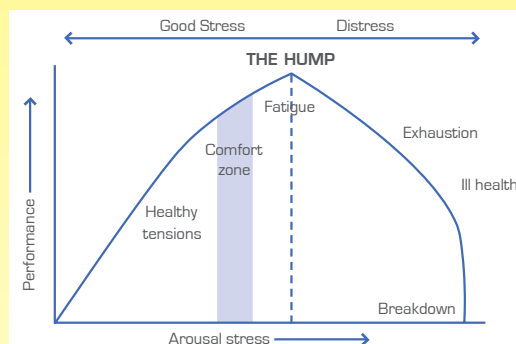
While it may make good financial acumen to restructure your operations; this change, if not managed correctly, is likely to place workplace stress on some workers. Knowing this, it is fundamental that you establish controls. Likewise, whilst your business may not be restructuring, consider the actions of your peers. The recent changes made by Westpac and ANZ, will most likely impact workers at other banks, as they become uncertain about their future. To remove the temptation of your workers thinking:

***Am I next? How will I be able to pay my mortgage or support my family if my job is not required?***

It is important that your business has established effective communication processes. If workers hear "silence", it is likely that they will generate their version of events. Think about it for a moment; will the right message be getting out? Or will it be convoluted?

Workplace stressors are not only psychosocial, they may also be physical. Physical stressors may result from both noise and poor ergonomics. One simple tool you can consider making available to your workers is [Action OHS Consulting's workstation setup checklist](#) aimed to reduce the opportunity for physical stressors associated with workstation setup.

Other factors commonly linked to work-related stress include: unreasonable deadlines; changes to duties; lack of autonomy; boring work; insufficient skills for the job; over-supervision; inadequate working environment or equipment; improper resources; limited opportunity for promotion; harassment and discrimination; and, crisis incidents, such as an armed hold-up or workplace death. How do you manage these? Or have you planned for such scenario?



Source: The American Institute of Stress

Temperature check your workplace. Do you:

- manage stress like you would a physical hazard. Identify, Assess, Control and Review.
- review workplace stress in Workplace Inspection program?
- establish contingency plans before current workers leave, or operations are down-sized?
- communicate the early warning signs to your business leaders, HSRs and workers? Some common early warning signs may include headaches, difficulty sleeping, difficulty concentrating, irritability, upset stomach and low morale.
- work through WorkSafe Victoria's Workplace Stress Risk Assessment tool to review: social and physical work environment; systems of work and management of work.

## DOES YOUR BUSINESS HAVE WORKING FATHERS?

According to new research from Southern Cross University in collaboration with Griffith University, working fathers with new babies experience cumulative fatigue which may pose a risk in the workplace.



The research investigated the relationship between fatigue and work safety behaviour of fathers with new babies. It was undertaken using a survey completed by 241 fathers mostly living on the Gold Coast. It found that fathers do experience increased fatigue

during early fatherhood and that they are unable to recover due to poor sleep. Furthermore it was found that this fatigue was related to a decrease in safety behaviour at work. Compared to other men, men with babies less than 12 weeks old were:

- 36% more likely to have a near miss at work and
- 26% more likely to have a near miss on the road to and from work.

“The results paint a disturbing picture of fathers with babies undergoing worsening fatigue over the first 12 weeks of their baby’s life, unrelieved by poor and interrupted sleep and with potential consequences to their work safety.” – Southern Cross University School of Health and Human Services, senior lecturer Gary Mellor.

Considerations to come out of this research are the ideas of reprioritising parental leave for men. While men typically do take time off during a child’s birth, the crucial period for rest and recuperation may come later than the initial two weeks.

Have you considered, or should you consider?

- Providing parental leave for fathers later in the baby’s life, rather than just the first two weeks.
- Providing fathers with the opportunity to take a long weekend or two over the first three months of the birth.
- Modifying their work environment to ensure fatigued new fathers are not doing higher risk jobs.
- Communicating flexible work practices to fathers over this period.

## ARE YOU TRAINING FOR COMPLIANCE OR TRAINING FOR SAFETY?

All managers and employees we speak with understand the need for training, however many businesses do not understand the purpose of it. Well-kept and documented training records demonstrate excellent compliance practices, not excellent training practices.

The purpose of training is not to demonstrate your records management skills; instead it is to ensure that your workers have been provided with the right skills to complete their job safely. Think about it for a second; has your training been developed for you workers, or have they been developed to tick a compliance box?

Whilst your business may have well-presented training materials, do these training materials focus on all learning styles? If your training is based on paper based instructions or reading off a computer screen, you may have missed the mark for some workers. Robust training should be developed to include all learning style. One of the most common and widely-used categorisations of learning styles is Fleming’s VARK model. This model suggests there are three learning styles:

- **Auditory:** The worker learns through listening. These workers depend on hearing and speaking as their main way of learning. Auditory learners must be able to hear what is being said in order to understand. These workers may have difficulty with instructions that are written.
- **Visual:** The worker learns when ideas, concepts, data and other information is associated and presented with images and techniques.
- **Kinaesthetic (Tactile):** Learning takes place by the workers doing the task or role playing the task, rather than listening to how the task is done or watching a demonstration.

Whilst most workers will learn across all styles, some may be strongly aligned to one style. To ensure that training is not only a compliance exercise, look to incorporate all three learning styles into the delivery of all of your training sessions.



## WORKERS COMPENSATION – IMPROVING YOUR BUSINESS'S BOTTOM LINE BY ACTIVELY MANAGING YOUR PREMIUM SPEND

Simplistically, your Workers Compensation Premium (Premium) is calculated by your: (i) claims cost history, (ii) total wage bill, and (iii) a number of industry factors. While every person in your workplace has the ability to impact your future “claims cost history”, by establishing a safer workplace,; is there anything that you can do now that may impact your “claims cost history” that will reduce your Premium next review – and assist you to financially contribute to your business’s bottom line? The answer is yes; here are some ideas on how:

- If you have outstanding workers compensation claims, organise (if you have not already) to review all of your open claims with your workers compensation insurer (at least quarterly). Plan to do this at least two months prior to your Workers Compensation Premium renewal to ensure all attendees have sufficient time to follow up on the agreed actions. As Premium renewal is typically 30 June, try to organise this meeting for May (even consider April next year).
- Work on a strategy to ensure that all closed claims are finalised by Friday 29 June (note 30 June 2012 is a Saturday).
- In NSW, WA, TAS, ACT and NT claims costs are estimated by the Workers Compensation Insurer. Where claims costs are estimated, ask for your agent to explain/justify their estimates – the larger the estimate, the larger your Premium cost will be. It is recommended you review all estimates with your insurer 2 to 3 days prior to renewal to ensure they are as low as possible (pencil this in for 27 – 29 June).
- In Victoria, a statistical case estimating (SCE) model is used to predict the lifetime cost of each claim, with the main factor being return to work. Early return-to-work strategies are strongly recommended in Victoria given SCE’s have a 3 month lag. This means a full return to work isn’t reflected in the SCE until 3 months after it has been coded by your insurer. Something to keep in mind for next year.

- Do you know your business Industry classification? The only way to check you have been classified correctly is to ask your Workers Compensation agent.

## OHS HARMONISATION UPDATE

Businesses with operations in New South Wales, Queensland, Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory and the Commonwealth would have seen that the harmonised WHS legislation commenced 1 January 2012. A copy of the updated legislation is available on our [website](#). As a result of this change, businesses in these states should by now have:

- Identified those people who will be classed as Officers of their business, and communicated to the Officer the legislated duties associated with this role.
- Reviewed their OHS [WHS] Management System, to align and then implement key legislative changes. Some of these changes include (but are not limited to):
  - How Officers and Directors in your organisation demonstrate positive due diligence.
  - How you plan to manage the additional responsibilities on your organisation, following the definition of “who is a worker” expanding.

In Tasmania, businesses should now be setting themselves up for the go-live date of 1 January 2013. This marks the date when they will adopt the harmonised legislation. These businesses should now be planning how they will manage the transition process; to set their business up for success.

Businesses in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia continue to wait and see what move their respective state government will take. An underling theme from the Safety In Action Conference, recently held in Victoria, was that businesses which align themselves to the model harmonised legislation will typically exceed the duties of their state’s current legislation. With these states inevitably transitioning to the harmonised legislation in the future, an early start in the transition process may be worth some consideration. If anything, look for the key changes that will assist you, make your business safer.