

INTRODUCTION

Winter – yes, delay that thought, but the reality is that it's fast approaching. The May 2013 Edition of *Building a Safe Workplace Together* will support you to commence considering your safety and risk management practices in relation to hazards that are typically associated with our “winter” season. Whilst there is a greater exposure to those working outdoors – office based workplaces will have some hazards to consider as well.

With the next issue of *Building a Safe Workplace Together* to be released in September 2013, we trust that this edition will assist you support your greatest assets – your employees.

OVERVIEW

- What have we been up to lately?
- What's New? *Online Ergonomics (Safe Workstation Setup) Module*
- The silly season – Stress and the end of financial year
- Managing your winter workplace hazards
- Training managers to succeed in safety
- Workers Compensation Update – WorkSafe Vic
- OHS/WHS harmonisation update

WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO LATELY?

Action OHS Consulting continues to work closely with our clients to build a safer workplace together. Some exciting projects we have undertaken since our last newsletter include:

- Commissioning clients to use our web-based OHS software. This came up in our last edition of the newsletter and may continue to come up! We continue to love how effectively our **web-based OHS Management Software** is supporting clients improve business operations and save administration and compliance money! The smiles and excitement from our clients makes this work very satisfying for us. View the [OHS Software](#) page on our website for more details
- Developed a number of challenging OHS Management Systems for smaller businesses where there have been a number of conflicting factors. We have been able to provide “out of the box” solutions that are aligned to their operations, thereby supporting implementation.
- Delivery of a number of workstation ergonomics training sessions that have empowered employees to understand what “safe workstation set-up” looks like, and have the confidence to adjust their workstation at work, home and into the future.

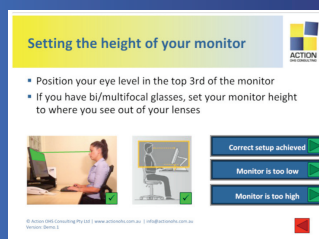
Along with the above work, Action OHS Consulting has recently supported clients with OHS training and noise surveillance. For more details on our service offering, please follow the link to the [Action OHS Consulting website](#).

WHAT'S NEW? Online Ergonomics (Safe Workstation Setup) Module

We are extremely proud to be offering our **online training module** to proactively assist you to support your workers who sit at a computer, to understand what safe workstation setup looks like.

From a compliance view-point, this module will capture those who have completed the online-training, report to you their workstation equipment requirements, flag their understanding of what safe workstation setup looks like and then identify if any employees require more attention.

Our **online training module** is designed to include your corporate logo, workstation equipment, safety vision and colours; this will ensure it fits your business needs.



To request a demonstration of the module, please let us know at info@actionohs.com.au.

* For orders placed prior to 30 June 2013, quote this newsletter to access 50% off the module setup fee.

THE SILLY SEASON – STRESS AND THE END OF FINANCIAL YEAR

Most of us associate Christmas as the silly season, however, for a lot of workplaces June 30 marks a significant milestone.

As workloads increase to meet budget or legislated timeframes – many employees will find this a stressful time in the work year. Excessive stress can interfere with productivity and impact physical and emotional health. You can't control everything in your work environment, but that doesn't mean you're powerless to do something.

Tips to support “stress” management

- Recognise warning signs of excessive stress. Communicate with your employees and actively seek out the signs – feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed; apathy, loss of interest in work; fatigue and problems sleeping; muscle tension.
- Take care of yourself. Make sure you exercise, eat well, sleep and avoid turning to alcohol.
- Prioritise and organise. Communicate if you over-commit; leave earlier in the morning (10-15 mins); break work into small steps for success and make a list of your tasks and rank by level of importance.
- Break bad habits. Flip your negative thinking; resist perfectionism and only focus on things you can control.

MANAGING YOUR WINTER WORKPLACE HAZARDS?

As the days get shorter and the weather gets cooler, it is a clear sign of winter drawing near. All workplaces, both indoors and outdoors, should be considering how they plan to manage these climactic changes. The extension of the definition regarding who is defined as a worker under the Harmonised Work Health and Safety Legislation should ensure workplaces that engage contractors also consider these risks when reviewing Job Safety Assessments (JSAs).

Outdoor work in winter months, freezer plants, meat packing houses and cold storage facilities all introduce a number of hazards that are not as typically apparent in warmer or drier environments, or the summer months.

We have not been able to locate any regulations specifying standards for minimum temperatures in the workplace. However, a workplace has a duty under the applicable OHS/WHS Legislation to provide a working environment that is safe and without risks to health. Your organisation has a duty to monitor conditions at the workplace – this includes temperature. Some workplaces have negotiated agreements in either their award or Enterprise Agreement; review this for guidance if you are not sure.

Research has found that incident rates increase as the temperature falls below 19°C

In addition, the Victorian Compliance Code for Workplace amenities and work environment includes provisions in relation to temperature:

- Optimum comfort for sedentary work is between 20°C and 26°C, depending on the time of the year and clothing worn. Employees undertaking work requiring physical exertion usually prefer a lower temperature range.
- With outdoor work, employees are to have access to shelter for eating meals and taking breaks, and for protection when weather conditions become unsafe. Employers need to ensure access to shelter (e.g. shelter sheds, caravans, tents, windbreaks, etc.). In some situations, vehicles or public facilities may provide adequate shelter.

Working in the cold? When working in the cold, clothing that is damp with rain, and the combined effect of wind, leads to body heat being lost faster. To minimise and manage heat loss, the body:

- Constricts the blood vessels, which reduces the volume of blood reaching the surface of the skin, makes work “feel” harder.
- Reduces our exposed body surface area by changing our posture to more “hunched”. This impacts our dexterity and skill.
- The body increases the metabolic heat production rate, either by voluntary movements such as the active movement (work), or involuntary movement (shivering). Cold muscle and soft tissue are more susceptible to damage.

Hypothermia. Hypothermia is one of the most serious hazards of exposure to cold working conditions. It is a decrease in the core body temperature to a level at which normal muscular and cerebral (brain) functions are impaired. The warning signs include:

- Numb hands, or involuntary shivering.
- Loss of fine motor co-ordination, particularly the hands (e.g. trouble with buttons, zips, simple tools).
- Slurred speech.
- Difficulty in thinking clearly and irrational behaviour (e.g. person beginning to discard clothing).

Hypothermia may lead to unconsciousness, even death. Most cases of hypothermia occur in air temperatures between 1°C and 10°C.

Do risks extend past cold related hazard? In addition to the temperature based hazards, there are a number of operational hazards that should be considered when reviewing the risks associated with outdoor work in the winter months. These include (but are not limited too):

- wetter work environments, and
- darker work environments.

In line with how we manage clothing in summer to protect against UV-Radiation, we should manage clothing in winter to support those working in the cold and those exposed to wetter weather. Are there alternative duties that can be done on wet days? Do you adopt PPE controls by providing wet and cold weather clothing?

The change in season also sees adjustments in length of day with sunrise occurring as late as 7:30am and sunset commencing as early as 5pm in winter. Do your operations consider this?

Risk Assess. Using your risk assessment methodology, identify winter based hazards that will affect your operations. Office/Indoor based operations are not immune. The scenario to the right includes a number of controls at the entrance to a building that may be considered on a rainy day. Are you familiar with these? Once controls are identified it is important to educate employees of these controls and up-skill the employees that are involved with making these available (e.g.

putting out signage and dispensers). It is important to review your controls – from experience; roll out matting can introduce slip and trip hazards.

Should you require any support, do not hesitate to [contact us](#).



TRAINING MANAGERS TO SUCCEED IN SAFETY



Training is critical for all organisations to ensure that managers have the appropriate knowledge and skills to competently complete the tasks expected of them.

How training is planned and structured varies considerably between organisations. During audit programs; we often ask our clients “what consideration did your organisation give to the skill(s) of the person identified to complete this task when writing this procedure?” and are often we are presented with a blank stare. In this edition of *Building a Safe Workplace Together* we take a look at the training managers to support the implementation of your safety program.

As safety professionals we govern the OHS Management System. Whilst consulting about our OHS procedures we review the process, often missing the conversation about how the “thing” will get done. Our OHS procedures meet a standard or an auditor’s desktop review; however, we find ourselves questioning why managers do not support us or “follow them”. All of a sudden the intention of the OHS Management System moves away from providing a safer working environment, to the safety professional doing the activities with an intention to meet audit requirements.

As safety professionals we understand “our piece of work”, “our role” and “our lingo”. We know the requirements of *Risk Management* as we follow “Hazard Identification > Risk Assessment > Control > Review”, we know how to establish *Corrective Actions* as we start our thinking at the “Hierarchy of Controls”.

Under the OHS legislation managers hold the duty to provide a safe workplace. If you are the safety professional in your organisation, have you clearly articulated to managers what you require from them? Whilst we understand the “safety talk”, managers have roles outside of safety and are therefore not always familiar with what the system may need from them. You may need to be directive – if the system directs them to complete a workplace inspection, provide them with:

- training,
- the tool, or direction on where to find the tool,
- the date it needs to be completed on (or by), and
- direction (who to involve, how to fill out, where to complete, who to notify of completion).

Whilst we find that businesses are good at operational training, they often neglect to clearly communicate and train managers and employees on how to complete the actions assigned to them via OHS Policies and Procedures.

Action

- Step 1: Identify the OHS system outputs you require others to complete.
- Step 2: Train your managers in all of the tasks you expect them to complete.
- Step 3: Make it simple. If you can provide clear direction on what they need to do – this will go a long way in supporting them to get the “things” done.

WORKERS COMPENSATION UPDATE - WORKSAFE VICTORIA

In 2012/13 WorkSafe expects to collect \$1.9 billion from around 201,000 employers at an average rate of 1.298% of remuneration.

Each year the premium system is reviewed and updated. In a recent WorkSafe Victoria discussion paper around improving *WorkSafe Victoria’s Injury Insurance and Premiums System*, a number of interesting proposed changes were raised.

- The remuneration deductible is uncommon amongst schemes and is not seen as being best practice as it creates inequity and distorts premium signals to small employers. The proposed changes will provide a premium discount for all good performers and will see the rates of most small and medium sized employers increase above the industry rate when a claim occurs. Small employers would continue to be protected from substantial rate increases in any one year by the 30% cap on annual rate increases for on-going activities.
- Smaller employers (those with annual remuneration of less than \$200,000) currently receive no financial incentive or recognition in their premium for good safety and RTW practices. Most of these employers pay premium based on the relevant industry rate. It is proposed that even small employers receive a discount of at least 10% off their industry rate if they have not made a claim during the experience period, however, if they were to have 1 or 2 significant claims, their premiums would be affected.

OHS/WHS HARMONISATION UPDATE

As of 1 January 2013, South Australia and Tasmania joined New South Wales, Queensland, ACT, Northern Territory and the Commonwealth in adopting the harmonised *Work Health and Safety Legislation*.

Western Australia and Victoria remain the only States yet to adopt the model harmonised laws.

If you would like assistance in understanding the operational approach that your business should take in light of the harmonised legislation, please [contact us](#).