

SDA Work Health & Safety Policy

Health and Safety

Work injuries and disease are caused by the work environment. Changes to the work environment need to be implemented, so that it is healthy and safe.

Work is dangerous to your health. As long as humans have to operate the processes of production. Effects range from backache, headache and boredom at one end of the scale, to physical or mental illness and death at the other. A workplace can contain a number of hazards for the unsuspecting employee.

Firstly, there are the more obvious unsafe working conditions:

- unguarded machinery
- slippery floors
- inadequate lighting
- heavy loads

Then there are the hidden hazards, which fall into a number of categories:

- chemical (dusts, fumes, vapours, gases)
- physical (noise, vibration, radiation)
- biological (infectious diseases, bacteria, viruses)
- psychological/organisational (stressors)

In developed countries it is recognised that, on average, one employee in ten suffers from an industrial incident each year forcing him/her to stop work.

Whatever figures are reported, they represent only a fraction of the real situation, owing to the fact that many incidents go unreported and many industrial diseases go unrecognised.

The amount of working time lost due to occupational injury is about 40 times that lost due to industrial disputes in Australia.

There is no basis to any argument that views disease, disablement and death as the tragic but inevitable costs of production.

It is clear that employees and the SDA have a vital role to play in ensuring that employers understand their obligations so that employees have a safe and healthy working environment.

SDA Policy

SDA Approach to Health and Safety

A preventive Occupational Health and Safety strategy must be based on the following principles:

1. Every worker has the right to work in an environment that is safe and healthy and free of the adverse effects of stress. It is the responsibility of the employer to provide and maintain a safe and healthy working environment.
2. Improvements in workers health and safety should be achieved through reducing hazards at their source and by modifying the workplace to fit the needs of workers, rather than through modifying workers behaviour to fit the demands of a hazardous workplace.
3. Workers have a right to know what hazards they may be exposed to at work, and employers have an obligation to provide this information.
4. Improvements in workers' health and safety can predominantly be achieved by united action to improve conditions, rather than by personal changes in lifestyles, hence health and safety is a legitimate trade union issue.
5. Governments have a responsibility to develop, review and enforce minimum standards and criteria that define a safe and healthy working environment in the retail industry.
6. Employers who breach recognised standards of Occupational Health and Safety causing injury and disease to workers or the community should be subject to criminal law.

Health and Safety Representatives

Union-elected Health and Safety Representatives are fundamental to the achievement and maintenance of the right of retail workers to a safe and healthy workplace.

Health and Safety Representatives should be accountable to the membership through normal trade union channels. To facilitate this process, Health and Safety Representatives should be Union members elected by Union members and operate as part and parcel of the Unions normal shop floor organisation.

In order to enable Representatives to effectively represent their members and carry out their functions, it is vital that the highest priority be given to education and training courses for such Representatives. In the first instance, all such courses should:

1. be managed by, and have their content determined by, the SDA; and
2. be conducted for all elected Representatives on paid education leave provided by the employer.

It is also necessary that on-going training be provided to assist Health and Safety Representatives in maintaining an awareness of current Occupational Health and Safety issues.

In order to perform their role effectively, Health and Safety Representatives have rights and responsibilities as set out below. These rights include:

1. To inspect all or part of the workplace at any time, taking photographs, samples or measurements as required.
2. To have access to all health and safety information relating to the workplace, providing information on individuals is obtained only with consent of that individual and shall not be used to the detriment of that person.
3. To call in a government inspector and to accompany that inspector during any visit he or she may make to the workplace, and to receive a copy of any report made.
4. To stop work and order workers and others at risk out of areas where an immediate threat to health and safety is suspected (with no loss of wages) pending the arbitration of an inspector.
5. To initiate provisional improvement notices on any hazards in the workplace (in States where applicable).
6. To be informed of any accident or hazardous event immediately it occurs, to carry out an emergency inspection of the site before anything has been disturbed (apart from changes made for safety reasons), and to be given copies of any reports prepared by the employer relating to the occurrence.
7. To represent workers in safety disputes or internal inquiries after accidents.
8. To be consulted by the employer on all changes to the workplace which may have implications for the health and safety of the workers they represent.
9. To perform all their activities on paid time, and to have adequate facilities for performing them.
10. To call in consultants or advisers to the workplace, after notifying the employer, and at the employers expense.
11. To be protected from victimisation or discrimination by employers in the performance of their duties.
12. To be able to perform these duties during working hours without loss of pay or other entitlements.

The Health and Safety Representative has a responsibility to keep the SDA advised of all relevant matters and act in consultation with SDA Officials where it is reasonable to do so.

Joint Union/Management

Health and Safety Committees

Health and Safety Committees should be set up according to the following criteria:

- They should be established according to the relevant legislation.
- They should have at least as many workers as management members
- They should meet regularly, at least once every three months.
- Time spent by workers at such meetings should be paid at appropriate rates, as contained in their EBA or Award.
- They should report all relevant matters to the employees.
- They should be given wide terms of reference to consider any matter relevant to workers health or safety raised by either side.
- They should develop joint policies and standards for the prevention and control of all workplace hazards, recognising existing Regulations and Codes of Practice as the minimum standards.
- They should consider aggregate incident/accident and disease statistics for the workplace to identify problem areas and make recommendations as to how such incidents/accidents and injuries can be avoided in future.
- They should be responsible for formulating, monitoring and disseminating to all employees the standards, practices, rules and procedures relating to the protection of workers health and safety.
- It is management's responsibility to implement the decisions of the joint committee as it is management's legal responsibility to provide a healthy and safe workplace.
- Committee members representing workers should receive appropriate training conducted by the SDA and paid leave to attend training courses.
- The role of the Health and Safety Committee is to complement the role of the Health and Safety Representative.

Government

Uniform and enforceable Work Health and Safety standards are a central means of preventing occurrences.

Standards should be developed by governments in consultation with the SDA in the form of enforceable Regulations.

Governments must apply sufficient resources in the areas of inspection and prosecution to ensure that these Regulations are adhered to.

Education and Training

All employees should receive appropriate training in Health and Safety. In particular, training must also be provided to managers and supervisors in the workplace.

The SDA believes that paid training leave should be provided by the employer for Work Health and Safety training.

Management

Many retail companies have traditionally paid insufficient attention to Occupational Health and Safety matters due to a preoccupation with sales, profits, and a belief that work organisation is a management prerogative. Occupational Health and Safety cannot be seen in such narrow terms.

Management has a duty and responsibility to develop comprehensive programs to maintain safe systems of work and a healthy working environment, in conjunction and by agreement with the SDA.

Principles of Hazard Management

Hazard management is the term applied to the systematic approach used to determine what is dangerous in the workplace, why it is dangerous and how to fix or control it.

A hazard management approach is applied in the development of national standards, Codes of Practice and guidance notes. It is this approach that should be applied to all health and safety issues.

Definitions

Hazard:

There are two basic types of hazards:

- those that endanger safety, and
- those that threaten a person's health.

Risk:

- the probability that a hazard will result in an incident/accident.

Hazard Management:

- the process used by an organisation to identify, evaluate and control hazards to reduce the risk of injury or disease.

Hazard Management Approach

Identification

- What are the potential hazards and/or risks?

Assessment

- What is the nature of the risk?

Control

- What are the options for control?

Monitor and Review

- Is the control effective?

It is important to understand these principles to be able to apply current health and safety Regulations and Codes of Practice.

Hazard Identification

Hazard identification is the process of identifying all the risks in the workplace together with the sources of those risks – the hazards. It involves the systematic investigation of all potential risks and identifying and recording the hazards which are causing them. A hazard refers to anything that has the potential to harm life, health and property.

Hazards may arise from:

- Workplace environment (e.g. building with inadequate ventilation)
- Equipment (e.g. machine with no safety guard)
- Substances (e.g. hazardous fumes from solvents)
- Work systems (e.g. fire escapes being used as a work area during peak times)

Hazards also come in many forms including:

- Physical (e.g. noise)
- Chemical (e.g. toxic gases)
- Ergonomic (e.g. The height of a work bench)
- Psychological (e.g. stress from excessive workload)
- Biological (e.g. syringes containing potentially infected blood)

There are many ways of identifying hazards:

- workplace inspections;
- employee complaints;
- analysis of accident/incident and sickness reports;
- monitoring information on Material Safety Data Sheets, industry journals, health and safety bulletins;
- employee surveys;
- accident inspections; and
- Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs)

How to Look at Your Workplace

The role of the Health and Safety Representative and Committee member is to identify problems and raise them with their employer.

It is the employer's responsibility to fix these problems.

It is important that all risks to workers' health and safety be:

- identified
- recorded
- reported
- resolved

You don't have to be an expert to inspect your workplace for hazards.

The people best qualified to identify dangerous situations are the ones who have to face them every day - the workers on the shop floor.

With a few basic skills, anyone can learn to spot dangers and track down hidden hazards.

Identifying Hazards

Inspections

1. General Inspections

Regular walk-around inspections should be conducted in the workplace in order to:

- check that agreed procedures are being complied with;
- bring to light problems which may not have been identified;
- check whether agreed changes or improvements have been carried out;
- discuss health and safety issues with members on the job; and
- raise your profile with members (be seen) as a Health and Safety Representative.

A checklist should be used when conducting the inspection and notes should be made on any items requiring attention of management. An example of a general checklist is contained in Appendix C of the manual.

2. Accident Inspections/Investigations

Health and Safety Representatives and Committee members should be informed by management whenever an incident or near miss occurs. They should also have the opportunity to inspect the site of the incident or near miss.

The Health and Safety Representative/Committee member should conduct a thorough examination of the causes of the incident or near miss.

Employers will often try to blame a worker for carelessness rather than focusing attention on unsafe systems of work.

Every accident investigation should be followed up by discussions with management with the aim of making changes to ensure that such an incident does not occur again.

Most State legislation now gives Occupational Health and Safety Representatives certain minimum legal rights of inspection and investigation.

The main facts required for a thorough investigation are:

- Who names of all involved and witnesses.
- What materials, equipment, substance.
- Where location, environment, photographs, sketches.
- When exact time, date stage of work cycle/shift.
- How sequence of events before, during, after.
- Why all possible direct and indirect causes.

3. Special Inspection

This might be an investigation of a complaint brought by a member, an investigation sparked by a hazard alert, or an investigation decided upon by the Health and Safety Committee.

Routine Hazard Information

Regular information updates can alert Representatives and Committees to new or previously unrecognised hazards. The SDA ¹s journal regularly includes information on current health and safety issues.

Standards and Codes

These consist of practical advice on issues and include preventative strategies to assist with hazard control.

They are a baseline for comparison and a check for organisations to see if they conform to relevant Acts and Regulations and meet the duty of care.

Employee Surveys

The best resource for identifying hazards is often the employees themselves.

The workforce can be surveyed with a simple written questionnaire or interviewed individually.

Questions may relate to hazards or specific health problems.

MSDS: Material Safety Data Sheet

Material Safety Data Sheets are a vital source of information for identifying chemical hazards. They provide information on the composition of a material, the safety and health hazards, and the control measures required. They should be consulted before materials are purchased and used on site. It is not necessary to be an expert to make effective use of an MSDS.

Report Hazards

After an inspection an OHS Representative or Committee member may have a number of hazards or potential hazards on their list. These problems must be reported and dealt with.

Priorities

If there is more than one hazard on the list, it is useful to number the hazards in priority order.

In deciding priorities, ask yourself:

- Which problems are the most serious or immediate threats to health and safety?
- Which problems are people most upset or angry about?
- Which problems can be corrected quickly?

Inform the management of your priority list.

All the problems you find can be solved. Some solutions are better than others. Check any solution proposed by management to see if it is the best solution available. Talk to the employees concerned to check that the proposed solution is suitable.

Risk Assessment

Once identified, a hazard must be assessed to gain an understanding of the potential severity or risk.

Risk refers to the probability of a person succumbing to danger. The process of risk assessment involves looking at the hazard as well as the likelihood of people being exposed to it.

When workers are exposed to a certain hazard they absorb a certain dose which has a certain effect.

If a connection can be established between dose and effect, there is a strong argument that the hazard causes the effect and therefore needs to be controlled.

The risk needs to be evaluated and the most appropriate type and level of control determined.

Risk assessment involves making a judgement and evaluating what is deemed to be an acceptable level of risk.

A risk assessment should include the following factors:

- frequency and duration of exposure
- consequences of the exposure to the hazard
- probability of an injury occurring.

A hazard assessment often requires assistance from an expert and usually involves:

- research
- measurement

The occupational specialists often used at this stage are:

- ergonomist – job and equipment design
- Occupational hygienist – asbestos, noise, radiation, chemicals.

Research may require the use of standard reference works (e.g. Material Safety Data Sheets for chemicals), an investigation of reports from similar studies and a comparison with recommended limits for exposure.

Risk Control

Once the hazard is identified and the risk assessed, appropriate measures need to be selected for controlling hazards in the workplace.

Risk control is taking action to eliminate or minimise risks that have been identified in the workplace. This can be achieved by applying the hierarchy of hazard control. They are listed in order from most preferred to least preferred control measure and can be used separately or in combination. There are often many different solutions to particular problems.

When selecting a control measure the aim should be to choose one as close to the top of the hierarchy as possible because the further down the hierarchy you go, the less effective the control measures are. This is because the measures at the top of the hierarchy are actually dealing with the hazard itself, while the measures lower down are more concerned with trying to change worker behaviour or getting the worker to adapt to the hazard, rather than fixing the hazard at the source.

Hierarchy of Hazard Control

1. Eliminate the Hazard

The best way to eliminate a risk is to remove the hazard. For example, remove the hazardous plant or chemical, or discontinue its use. If the risk cannot be eliminated there are several control options that can be used alone or in combination.

2. Substitute with a Lesser Hazard

The second best option for controlling a risk is to substitute it. For example, substituting an unsafe chemical with a safer one (e.g. organic, approved by a dermatologist, etc.) or substituting an unsafe piece of plant or equipment with a safer one.

3. Modify the Work System or Process

The third best option for controlling a risk is to modify it. For example, modifying the machinery to include safety guards or eliminating a hazardous step in an unsafe procedure.

4. Isolate the Hazard

The fourth best option for controlling a risk is to isolate it – that is, relocate the hazard away from employees.

For example, placing acoustic booths around noisy equipment or using automated mechanical devices instead of manual labour.

5. Engineering Controls

The fifth best option for controlling a risk is through the use of engineering controls. For example, using mechanical aids, forklifts, trolleys, or conveyor belts.

6. Administrative Controls

The sixth best option for controlling a risk is through the use of administrative controls. This is the use of safe work practices to minimise exposure to the hazard.

For example, training, job rotation, or using written procedures to indicate how tasks are to be done or who is permitted in certain areas.

7. Personal Protective Equipment

The least preferred option is the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). PPE is a means of covering and protecting a workers body from hazards, e.g. protective clothing, footwear and gloves. PPE can be used to supplement a higher order control, or as a short-term measure until a higher order control is provided. When PPE is required the employer must provide and maintain it.

General Problems with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

All forms of PPE have a common drawback – the hazard still exists. Therefore, any failure of personal protection would lead to the worker being exposed to the hazard. It also has the following disadvantages:

- PPE frequently does not provide the protection claimed.
- PPE is uncomfortable and makes working more difficult.
- PPE often creates a hazard in itself.
- Protection offered by PPE cannot be monitored.
- Protection offered by PPE is a constant responsibility that is imposed on the worker.
- PPE effectiveness depends on a good fit with workers.
- Reliance on PPE inhibits the development of new control technologies.
- Workers require training and information to safely use PPE, which are often not provided.

The appropriate control measures must ensure that:

- the hazard is adequately controlled;
- workers can do their jobs without undue discomfort or stress;
- new hazards are not created; and
- any person at risk is protected.

Monitor For Effectiveness

Once a measure for controlling or reducing a hazard has been selected and implemented, it is important to monitor its effectiveness to ensure that the expected result is achieved and maintained.

- Check that changes are being used correctly.
- Check that assessed risks have been reduced.
- Monitor whether employees are reporting unwanted effects that may increase or introduce other hazards.

Record Risk Control Decisions

All risk control decisions for each hazard assessed should be documented.

SDA Manual

The SDA has produced a comprehensive Manual on workplace health and safety. Copies of that manual are available from the SDA (free to members and a nominal charge to non-members).

That manual deals in detail with the major hazards in SDA workplaces such as:

- Alcohol, Drugs and Impairment
- Asbestos
- Atmospheric Contaminants
- Bullying
- Electro-Magnetic Radiation
- Fire Drills and Evacuation
- First Aid
- Forklifts
- Hazardous Substances
- Heat and Cold
- Manual Handling
- Noise
- Occupational Overuse Syndrome
- Plant
- Pregnancy and Work
- Screen-Based Equipment
- Skin Hazards
- Shift Work
- Stress
- Varicose Veins
- Violence

Copies of SDA Bulletins on any of these issues are available from the SDA.