


# A Safe Working Environment

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## Introduction

Organisations are legally responsible for establishing and maintaining a working environment where employees are able to work safely, without risk to their physical and psychological health and welfare.

Likewise, employees are obliged to: comply with any legislative requirements and organisational policies and procedures; work in accordance with agreed safe work practices; and use all means provided to protect their health and safety.

Employer and employee health and safety responsibilities are often prescribed in legislation and supported by regulations, codes of practice and standards. These provide a foundation for guidelines on workplace safety, compensation and rehabilitation.

## Key Principles and Objectives

As a baseline employers take all 'reasonably practicable' steps to provide a working environment where employees can work without risk to their health, safety or welfare. Employers are also often required to establish workplace arrangements that allow for effective consultation on workplace health and safety matters.

Employees are obliged to cooperate with their employer and act in a manner that does not affect their safety or the safety of others in the workplace.

Organisations should be committed to maintaining the highest possible level of physical, mental and social well-being at work for its employees. All employees should look for ways to maintain or improve work conditions, processes, and behaviours as an ongoing commitment.

A manager is the conduit for ensuring both the organisation and employees maintain their duty of care. This chapter will provide managers with good practical information and advice to

- report
- prevent
- and manage injuries and rehabilitation including maintaining mental health.

## Your Role

All managers have a duty of care for the health and safety of their work group. This duty often extends to visitors and contractors in the work environment.

A manager is required to be a model of appropriate behaviour and practice in the workplace, to educate, communicate with, and monitor staff to maintain a safe and healthy workplace, both physically and behaviourally. Recognising hazards, identifying problems and taking preventative action, as well as preventing the reoccurrence of any reported incidents or hazards is an ongoing responsibility.

Senior managers are responsible for the establishment, monitoring and evaluation of organisational policies, agreements, plans, and procedures. This ensures that the organisation, its managers and staff, can fulfil the appropriate duty of care. You are required to provide the support and opportunity for health and safety inspections, investigations, and resolutions to be implemented, and ensure that line managers are capable of undertaking their OHS responsibilities.

Line managers are responsible for ensuring that staff are aware of and abide by WHS requirements. You are also responsible for managing practical and operational health and safety activities to prevent, report, and manage rehabilitation and injuries.

## Prevention

The most useful preventative measure to reduce employee occupational risk is to make health and safety awareness an everyday practice with your staff. Proactive activities managed by you will prevent or minimise the risk of occurrences. This will include comprehensive reporting of incidents and hazards, ongoing observation and early intervention. The good health and safety of your staff has a fundamental impact on your ability to efficiently and effectively manage delivery of a work program.

Undertaking proactive activities will contribute to maintaining legislative and internal compliance, while fostering a positive work group culture based on safety awareness. In addition, regularly conducted information sessions will remind staff of their own responsibilities for health and safety. Proactive workplace safety activities include:

### Tips

- Lead by example.
- Regularly check workstations and arrange assessment as required.
- Ensure staff takes regular breaks.
- Conduct regular workplace reviews and risk audits with your staff.
- Attend relevant training where provided.
- Conduct or organise regular information sessions.
- Ensure your staff are aware of the 'warning signs' of common workplace risks and injuries and to report them.

- conduct regular hazard inspections in your work area
- observe any patterns in your staff that may indicate health/safety issues and seek advice and support from your corporate support units.
- support workplace investigations as they will make a difference to future workplace health and safety
- having health and safety as an ongoing agenda item for team meetings, such as a discussion on organisational policy and procedures, outcomes of workplace inspections and reviews of incident or hazard reports by team members.

Your staff also plays an important role in the prevention of both physical and psychological workplace injuries. Potential injuries may be prevented through your employees continual awareness of how they operate, and the processes, practices and behaviours that can be improved.

Discussing workplace health & safety with your staff, and leading by example, are the best preventative tools that you have as a manager - use them on a regular basis.

[Back to top](#)

## Key Processes and Objectives (continued)

### Absence Notification

Early notification of employee absenteeism is crucial as extended unplanned absence may be work related. Be responsible and accountable by notifying to the relevant corporate area.

### Managing Injuries and Rehabilitation

In addition to minimising or eradicating poor health and safety practices and occurrences, it is also essential to support staff who have suffered an incident, illness or injury while on duty. The organisation will work with the person, and make reasonable adjustments for a safe and sustained return to work.

Sometimes the stressor is outside the work environment and could be a non-work-related illness or a pre-existing condition.

The employee may require rehabilitation, a graduated return to work, or reasonable adjustments to work outcomes or the physical work environment. You may be responsible for an employee in these circumstances, and you may also have to review work priorities, re-allocate key duties, or obtain additional staff while the person is absent.

When the employee returns to work you will need to monitor changes in attendance or capability patterns for continued discussion with the employee to ensure the rehabilitation process is effectively and responsibly implemented. Support will be provided through the allocated case manager and other corporate services areas.

#### Tips

- Know how to adjust the environment, outcomes and performance agreements for reasonable adjustment and rehabilitation.
- Pay attention to changes in behaviour e.g. withdrawal, apathy, agitation.
- Note and discuss with staff any patterns or increase in unscheduled absences.
- Observe any changes in working relationships.
- Note any additional work challenges or pressures.
- Note unexpected performance problems.
- Maintain regular ongoing support and feedback.
- Respect confidentiality.

## Managing Psychological Health

Work-related psychological hazards are present in all workplaces, and while often complex the risks associated with these hazards, in the same way as other workplace hazards, can be controlled. Possible indicators that the psychological health of your team or an individual team member is at risk include mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression, physical symptoms such as increased reports of aches and pains, gastrointestinal upsets, increased tiredness and fatigue and behavioural changes such as sadness, withdrawal, substance abuse, aggression and poor concentration.

Early intervention, comprehensive reporting, prevention and rehabilitation management also applies to the psychological well-being of employees, however there is no single approach to best tackle work-related stress factors or how an employee experiences it.

A healthy work environment is about more than being safe. A Healthy workplace is one where employees in addition to feeling secure and enjoying a safe physical work environment;

- feel recognized for the work they do
- enjoy a positive social environment that encourages respect, fosters a sense of belonging and purpose
- enjoy an appropriate balance between work and home-life responsibilities;
- have the ability to influence their work and become involved in the decision-making process

- are given opportunities for personal, intellectual and professional growth

**[See also the chapter on Health and well-being](#)**

[Back to top](#)