

Employsure e-guide

Work Health and Safety

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Chapter 1

Where to start?

Where to start?

Good health and safety standards always start with the people at the top. Directors and board members have responsibility for work health and safety, no matter how big or small the business. Their role in ensuring health and safety is vital for good governance, and non-compliance can have significant penalties both financially and personally.

Health and safety laws place responsibility on employers to identify any risks, resolve these where possible, and notify employees of best practice. It is therefore vital that employers get informed about their obligations.

With high standards of health and safety, employers will also see benefits to the business and protect it from any bad publicity or potential employee unrest that might follow a serious accident or prosecution.

Employer tip.

Effective health and safety policies can bring a business:

- increased productivity
- reduced insurance premiums
- fewer absences from sickness
- better employee retention and morale
- reduced costs of training replacement employees

Informing employees.

One of the duties of an employer is to make sure employees are well informed about their health and safety at work. Australian work health and safety legislation states that employees must be aware of any potential hazards and safe methods while at work. There are a number of ways employers can share this information but, whatever way chosen, employees need to clearly understand what is required of them.

Toolbox talks.

‘Toolbox talks’, sometimes known as ‘tailgate meetings’ or ‘safety briefings’, are informal safety meetings usually held for particular tasks. Other businesses may run team briefings where the manager talks to the team about safety in their workplace. In any case, record details of the topics discussed and who was at the meeting.

Training needs analysis.

Regularly conducting a training needs analysis to decide if employees need further training in health and safety is essential to continue to meet obligations. This can be done in-house or via an external trainer, depending on the situation.

Always record the type of training undertaken by employees and have them sign for any training taken.

External assistance.

A workplace specialist or safety representative can provide a risk assessment of any workplace. They can also assist employers in communicating this knowledge with employees. Providing employees with the findings of any risk assessments and putting this in writing is the safest way of working.

Ensure all employees are aware of workplace safety and **use a workplace specialist for peace of mind.**



Chapter 2

Accident records.

What are accident records?

Accidents are not always preventable but as they may happen, employers must respond appropriately and in line with legal obligations. To do this, employers must keep a record of every workplace accident (often called a register of injuries). This must be available at all times and must include the name of the injured person, the date and time of injury, brief description of what happened, where it happened and its cause, among other details.

Anyone injured at work, including an employee, agency worker, contractor, customer or visitor, must be on the register of injuries. Personal data must always be stored carefully and in line with privacy laws.

The incident should also be reviewed to find out whether there are steps that could be taken to stop it from happening again. A serious injury, or risk to plant and equipment, will need a more in-depth investigation.

In some cases, employers have to use a particular form for workplace accidents. Work health and safety (WHS) legislation states employers must also keep records of certain incidents, for example death, hospitalisation or serious injury. The requirement to keep records about work health and safety matters is subject to the WHS legislation that applies in each state or territory.

Employer tip.

An accident record must include:

- name of the injured person
- date and time of injury
- brief description of what happened
- where it happened and its cause.



Chapter 3

Working from home and lone working.

Working from home and lone working.

Working at home is becoming increasingly common thanks to technology. It cuts down on costs for the employer and offers more flexibility to employees who need it, such as working parents or people who live a long way from work.

Employers have a legal responsibility to protect the health, safety and welfare of employees, even when they work at home. The same health and safety rules apply, not only to employees, but to others affected by their working at home.

If an employee asks to work at home, careful consideration of their personal circumstances, whether they can carry out their role at home, any health and safety matters must be undertaken in line with the needs of your business.

Before employees start work at home, employers should carry out a risk assessment of the home office to see if there are any potential hazards or safety risks. Once it meets legal standards, employers can allow home working, and note it is a legal right for some employees to request flexible work. Arranging a discussion with the employee's manager each year to confirm the home office still complies and noting any problems and action taken is vital to ensure the home office managed safely.

The assessment will vary depending on the tasks of each employee. An example is assessing the home worker's chair, desk, and keyboard as well as the office space. Employees can use a Display Screen Equipment (DSE) checklist to see whether their workstation is ergonomically sound. An assessor

should check for hazards, such as trailing power cords or computer cables. Employers should keep a comprehensive policy on working from home arrangements. The policy should ask employees to report any health and safety concerns or incidents and allow for a periodical review of the home working arrangement.

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Work health and safety law still applies to **employees working from home.**

What is lone working?

Lone workers are those working without direct or close supervision.

Mobile workers, such as drivers, surveyors, engineers or care workers, are lone workers when they work away from their employer's base. Some lone workers are at a fixed workplace but are isolated, or in a maintenance role that takes them all over the worksite. "On call workers" who work overtime, outside normal hours or who open and close work premises, can also be deemed lone workers.

Risks of lone working.

Lone workers are more at risk than others because of the nature and location of their work. They risk violent attack, whether from a thief when opening or closing work premises, or because they work in an area of social deprivation or with vulnerable people. Some lone workers risk being in serious road accidents or injuring themselves because of previously unknown poor health.

Employer tip.

Be aware. Lone workers may:

- be unfamiliar with the risks of a remote worksite
- adopt unsafe practices because they have no supervision
- manually handle tools and equipment between vehicle and workplace or during deliveries
- may not have access to help or advice in case of sudden illness, accident or other emergency

How to reduce the risks of lone working.

Employers have multiple options to reduce the risks to lone workers:



Train them fully in the risks of their type of lone working



Set up a system of routine communication



Identify potentially violent situations and use control measures that could reduce or stop this from happening



Provide effective emergency procedures



Chapter 4

Long term illness.

Long term illness.

It is not easy when an employee has a long-term illness. Employers have to balance the concern for their health with the needs of the business. It is very important to understand that the employee cannot be fired because they have been sick for a long time and they must not be treated less favourably because of their illness. See Employsure's guide on leave obligations for more information on this topic.

If an employee runs out of paid sick leave and is still unfit for work, they are allowed to take unpaid leave. It is wise to seek professional advice when managing an employee with a long term illness because employees have many safeguards in this area.

Medical reports.

When establishing the nature of an employee's injury or illness Sometimes it is necessary to get a medical opinion from a doctor who does not already know the employee. This is called an independent medical assessment.

General Practitioners are not always the best people to deal with workplace health matters, especially stress-related, or to decide whether or not an employee can return to work. A specialist is qualified to provide an independent medical assessment to decide whether an employee is fit for duties. An employer may use an independent medical assessment for employee illnesses or injuries, regardless of whether they are related to work.



Chapter 5

Creating a WHS policy.

Creating a WHS policy.

The work health and safety obligations for employers vary widely depending on the type of work conducted by the business. For example, the safety issues faced by a construction company are very different to those faced by an accounting firm, which are again different to those faced by a beauty salon. Despite the differences, there are four fundamental elements of work health and safety that apply to every workplace regardless of industry.

Establish workplace safety.

- Identify hazards in the workplace that may harm workers.
- Create and implement a written policy with clear guidelines about what is expected from all parties. This policy should be signed and dated by the employer, and be easily available to employees at all times. For example, displayed around the workplace.
- Include staff in consultation about safety in the workplace to increase awareness of safety issues and improve the safety culture in the workplace.
- Manage hazards.

Employers should complete a risk assessment that assesses any possible situation that could happen in the workplace. Things like employees using a ladder to access objects from a height, or electrical cords running down a hallway should be considered a risk and minimised as much as possible.

Employer tip.

When looking to manage hazards, it is important to focus on the likelihood of an injury and its severity to determine the best way to minimise its risk.

Staff training.

It is essential to train and supervise all staff in workplace health and safety. Training of employees can be as a collective, such as via mass emails or at toolbox talks on companywide updates which are relevant to all staff.

A more specific and focussed effort can be paid to individual jobs or tasks, with training aimed at employees that are directly involved in these tasks and not the whole company.

Review.

Employers should regularly review the practices aimed at increasing safety and determine what is working well, as well as what is not working and needs to be addressed.

- Ask -

Ultimately, are the practices working to eliminate risk?

Download our infographic on workplace safety.



[Download here.](#)



Chapter 6

Manual handling.

Manual handling.

A common cause of injury in any business is manual handling. Manual handling is a higher risk in industries such as retail and hospitality where it may not be an everyday task, meaning employees are less likely to be thoroughly trained.

Employers must try to minimise the risk of injuries so far as reasonably practicable. Reducing the risk of injury, as well as potential disruption to your business, can be done by reviewing the tasks employees undertake manually and applying best practice.

Manual handling includes pushing, pulling or any other bodily force, in order to lift and carry loads. The most common injuries are lower back pains, neck pain and problems with shoulders and arms, including forearm, elbow, wrist, hand and

fingers. These injuries can result from lifting a heavy or unbalanced load only once, or from continual handling.

Employers have a duty to reduce manual handling wherever possible, or at least lower the risks associated. Introducing mechanical aids or making small changes to work processes or procedures can go a long way to minimising the risks. Training, whether in manual handling techniques or in correct use of mechanical aids is another important step employers can take.

Download our manual handling poster [here](#) to ensure employees are using the safest process.

While the weight of any load is critical, the frequency of lifting, posture while lifting, **the surrounding environment and the employee's physical fitness are also important factors to consider.**

HOW TO AVOID A MANUAL HANDLING INJURY WHEN LIFTING:



1

Plan and check for dangers to yourself or others. Is the destination of the load clear, free from obstruction and within reason?



2

Check your balance and position. Is the load stable, within your weight limits and easy to grip?



3

When lifting items use your legs. Do not jerk when lifting, keep the movement smooth and take a rest if needed.



4

When moving your load, move from your feet. Do not twist and keep the heaviest part of the load against your body.



5

Ensure that others can see you. If required, wear your personal protective equipment (PPE).



Chapter 7

Hygiene and first aid.

Hygiene in the workplace.

All workplace environments need to be hygienic and safe for employees and visitors, even those which are not involved in the production and handling of food and personal products. Implementing a workplace hygiene policy is an effective way to ensure that all employees follow the same standards. Below are some key areas every workplace hygiene policy should address.

Personal hygiene.

Personal hygiene refers to the cleanliness, appearance and habits of employees, which can be a sensitive issue for managers and business owners. An official policy helps to ease any awkwardness by establishing precisely what is expected from employees. Criteria may include showering, using deodorant or perfume, grooming facial hair, and hair-washing. Hand washing and the use of hand sanitisers also has great importance as a protection against the spread of illnesses.

Work area cleanliness.

Workplace hygiene policies should also make provision for each employee to clean and maintain their own workstation or work areas. The hygiene policy could include regular cleaning of surfaces with disinfectant to reduce the risk of bacterial contamination. Policies typically also include keeping the area tidy and free of clutter.

Employer tip.

Include a workplace hygiene policy in the employee handbook so all staff are aware of expectations.

Restroom facilities.

The workplace hygiene policies and requirements should provide restrooms for all employees to be equipped with hot and cold running water, hand soap, toilet paper and hand drying towels or equipment. This is to ensure that workers can practice personal hygiene after using the facilities. Some businesses hire an external cleaning service to attend to the restrooms. If employees are required to maintain the facilities themselves, however, the workplace hygiene policy could include details such as the frequency of cleaning and the type of products to use for cleaning the floor, toilet bowls and sinks.

Kitchen facilities.

Hygiene policies for the kitchen area in a workplace environment need to cover regular cleaning and maintenance of utensils and equipment. Employees who are unhappy about the levels of workplace hygiene can complain if they believe the standards of cleanliness are poor enough to constitute a health risk; such complaints will need to be addressed appropriately and in a timely manner.

Encourage employees to take personal responsibility

to protect themselves and to practice good hygiene.

First aid.

Every workplace is different, which means the first aid requirements will vary depending on the type of business, the size, the location and the number of employees. Workplaces must have arrangements in place, which are tailored to their specific circumstance.

Accidents can occur in all workplaces regardless of the industry, however being prepared and knowing how to minimise potential risk can help prevent an incident and/or reoccurring accidents. A workplace must provide, as far as is reasonably practicable, a safe working environment for all employees. This includes having first aid kits and suitably trained first aid officers.

First aid kits.

All employees must be able to easily access a first aid kit. The quantity

of first aid kits depends on the size of the workplace and risk level. A high risk workplace is one where employees are exposed to hazards which could result in serious injury or illness. For example, employees who frequently use hazardous machinery, work from heights, work in confined spaces or work in or around extreme temperatures. A low risk workplace is one where employees are not exposed to hazards that could result in serious injury or illnesses.

Whilst the content of first aid kits may vary across different workplaces, each first aid kit should always include the basic equipment for administering first aid to injuries. The exact contents should be based on the specific risk assessment conducted for each workplace. A first aider who has had the adequate training (refer to the next section for information on what constitutes adequate training), should be nominated to maintain the first aid kit, and should record it being maintained.

The first aid kit should be easily identifiable, and made from material which will protect its contents from dust, moisture and contamination.

Low risk workplaces require:

- one first aid kit for every 10 to 50 employees
- one additional kit is required for every additional 50 employees up to 200
- after 200, one additional kit is required for every additional 100 employees

Higher risk workplaces require:

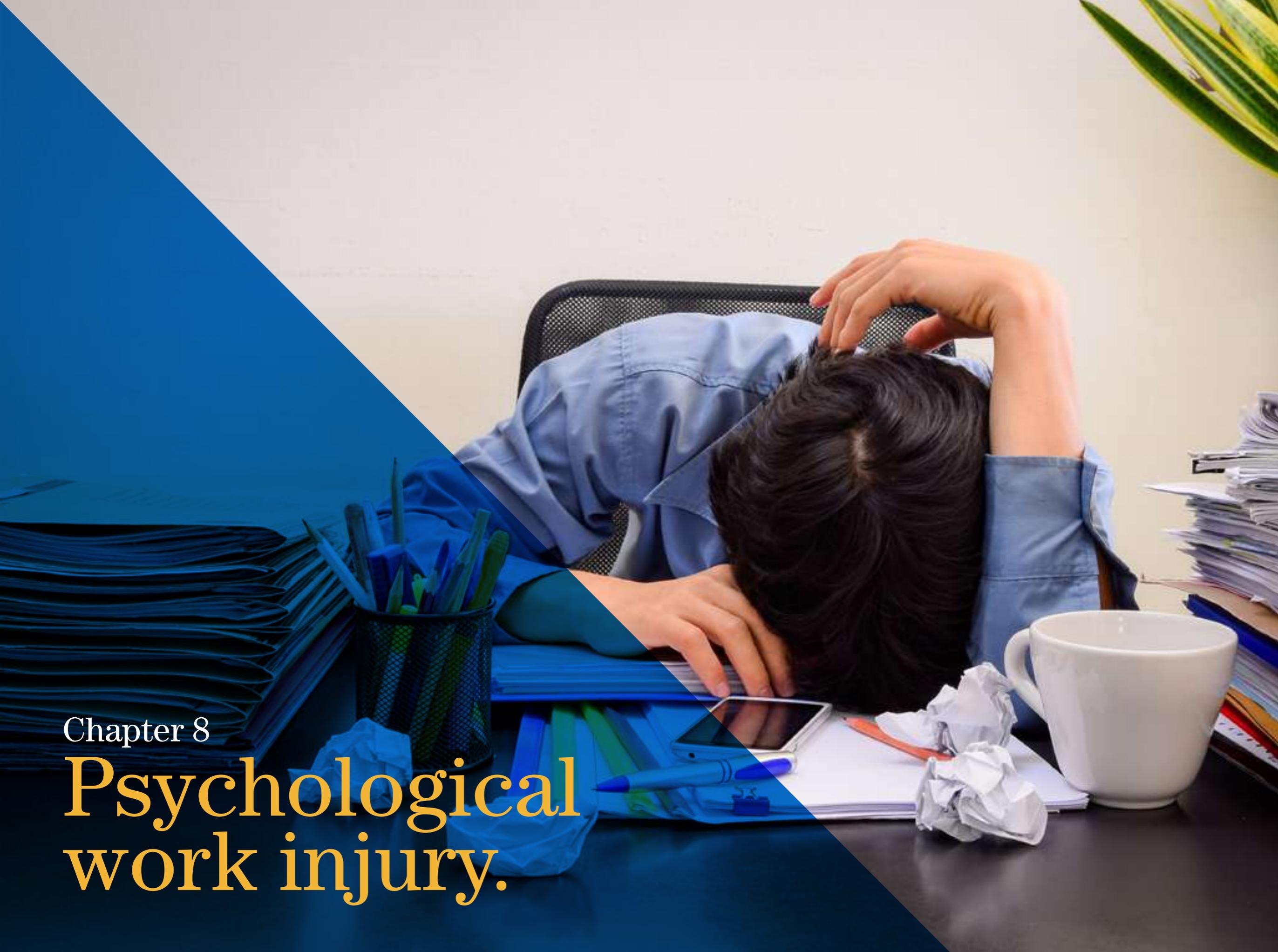
- one first aid kit for up to 25 employees
- two kits for up to 50 employees.
- more than 50 employees, one additional kit is required for every additional 50 employees

If there is no medical service readily available, then at least one first aid kit is required for every 25 employees. Employees who work alone or in remote locations must have easy access to a first aid kit.

What are first aiders?

A first aider is the term used to describe a person who has completed a nationally accredited training course that has taught them how to administer first aid. First aiders should attend training on an annual basis, in order to keep up to date on accurate processes and procedures. Depending on the type of workplace, some first aiders may need to undertake training in order to respond to specific hazards within their workplace.

First aiders should also maintain accurate and up to date records, which includes a record of any first aid given.



Chapter 8

Psychological work injury.

Stress in the workplace.

Workplace stress is a serious issue, as it not only affects the health and wellbeing of employees, but may also have a detrimental effect on business productivity. Employers are responsible for both the physical and psychological health and safety of all their employees, as far as reasonably practicable.

The reasons for stress can vary across different generations. Younger workers are more likely to be stressed as a result of exposure to workplace or occupational violence, whilst older workers tend to feel stressed due to high work pressure.

Why might employees experience stress at work?

- the culture of the organisation
- bad management practices and frequent change in management
- lack of job satisfaction
- the physical working environment
- lack of support or training
- long hours or heavy workloads
- lack of proper resources or equipment

In the same way that a risk management approach is essential to identify the physical aspects of workplace safety, it is important that employers use the same method to identify any risks to employee psychological health.

Once identified, steps need to be taken to reduce risks to employee psychological health, including workplace stress.

Employer tip.

Steps to reduce workplace stress:

- ensure employees are adequately trained in their roles
- provide a safe working environment
- apply an 'open door policy' for employees to raise grievances
- provide managerial training on how to identify and react to stress

Bullying and WHS.

To define an action as bullying, it needs to be considered a risk to employee health and safety. Owners, directors and managers have the responsibility of ensuring a safe workplace for their employees, and businesses can be investigated if they allow workplace bullying to take place, given bullying is deemed a WHS risk.

A bullying complaint can, in some circumstances indicate that a person feels their safety is threatened at work. Having policies and procedures that deal with safe work practices and how an employee can raise a bullying complaint will certainly help to reduce this risk and ensure employees are aware of how they can raise any grievances.

Whether a legitimate or false bullying claim is put forward by an employee, it is essential for employers to be proactive when addressing the grievance. Simply dismissing or ignoring allegations rather than following up can have serious consequences.

Businesses can benefit from being both proactive and reactive to bullying claims put forward by employees.

Workers compensation claims.

With any perceived unsafe physical or psychological incident comes the risk that an employee could raise a claim for compensation. Whether it is a physical or psychological incident, recording and reporting are a must. Recording that an incident has occurred and reporting it to any relevant party are the vital steps that must be taken, even if no action is needed.

Psychological claims, or stress claims, are those which come about over the course of managing employees. These claims can be challenged by employers if there are genuine performance or conduct management issues with records on file.



For more information about workplace bullying, download our e-guide on [Workplace Discrimination, Bullying and Violence](#).

Navigating workplace relations can be confusing.

Employsure works directly with employers to ensure they stay on top of rapidly changing legislation and provide a fair and safe workplace for their staff.

Whether it be dealing with a difficult employee, facing a tribunal claim or reviewing work health and safety, our clients can rest assured we have them covered.

Get in touch with us today to find out how we can help your business grow.

1300 651 415

www.employsure.com.au

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