

KEEPING HEALTH AND SAFETY *FIRST* IN MIND

Looking after your employees
during times of change



Australian Government

Comcare

PUTTING YOU *FIRST*



Organisational and workplace change is a fact of working life and can bring about positive changes for organisation and employees such as increased productivity, clarity of role and increased work satisfaction.

This document provides guidance for employers to integrate occupational health and safety and risk management into corporate planning during times of organisational change. Change can be challenging for some people, and if not managed well, can affect morale and level of employee engagement with their work. Possible consequences may include reduced work performance, increased absenteeism and the potential for psychological or other injuries which may result in workers' compensation claims.

During times of organisational change it is important to give attention to Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) as part of an integrated approach to risk management and corporate planning. This includes consideration of any employees who are away from the workplace as a result of injury or illness or participating in a rehabilitation program. The following checklist is a guide to elements to be considered during times of organisational change.

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PREVENTION: TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE A SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Prevention is the key to creating a safe and healthy workplace for employees affected by change. This can be achieved by systematically addressing the risks associated with organisational change (physical and psychosocial) that may lead to injury, prior to and after employees have commenced work in the changed circumstances or environment.

Physical hazards associated with organisational change will vary depending on the particular workplace but the following actions are important:

- > Conduct risk assessments on new work arrangements
- > Provide employees with information, training and supervision on new duties and any OHS procedures
- > Conduct workstation assessments to ensure the immediate work environment is well set up for employees
- > Provide induction to new work area including information on fire and first aid procedures
- > Ensure that employees are aware of the agency's Health and Safety Management Arrangements.

Psychosocial hazards are those aspects of the design, organisation and management of work and its social and environmental context that can cause psychological, social or physical harm. Providing effective leadership and communication is essential during periods of change. Factors relevant to managing psychosocial hazards during times of change are:

- > **Demands** – in planning work arrangements consider the impact of changing workload, work patterns and working environment
- > **Control** – consult employees to seek their input and identify the best ways to organise work
- > **Support** – ensure managers and team leaders have the appropriate training and skills to support employees through times of change. Managers need to be aware of the human resources support available to them and where to go for assistance
- > **Relationships** – promote positive working practices to avoid conflict and focus on team morale and peer support
- > **Role** – communicate clearly and consistently so employees understand any changes in roles within the organisation, and address any perceived role conflict
- > **Change** – develop and implement a communication strategy to manage and communicate the change process throughout the organisation. Plan regular communication activities to consult and engage employees.

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EARLY INTERVENTION: MONITOR WELL-BEING OF EMPLOYEES AFFECTED BY CHANGE AND ADDRESS ANY CONCERNS

Early intervention is the key to supporting employees who are not coping in the workplace. It means assisting an employee before symptoms develop into an injury. Responding early can often prevent the employee from becoming ill, taking long-term sick leave or needing to submit a workers compensation claim. The following actions are important:

- > Provide managers with information so they can recognise early warning signs of employee distress and low morale (these include: unplanned absences, increased conflict, withdrawal and deteriorating work performance)
- > Ensure employees are aware of support and assistance that is available to them, such as Employee Assistance Programs
- > Ensure managers know how to access and utilise support and assistance that human resources areas may provide, particularly in relation to managing employees at risk
- > Use organisational health data to proactively identify and respond to hot spots.



← EXIT

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REHABILITATION: ENSURE ARRANGEMENTS ARE IN PLACE TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEES RETURNING TO WORK OR WHO ARE OFF WORK DUE TO INJURY/ILLNESS

When an employee is not at work due to a work-related injury or illness they may feel isolated and detached from the workplace. It is particularly important to include these employees in communication of change and provide the necessary support to facilitate a return to work. Whether the injury is a physical or psychological condition the approach is similar. Return to work outcomes are improved where an employee perceives that their work is valued, management is committed to the return to work effort (such as finding suitable duties) and there is peer support on returning to work. The following actions are important:

- > Provide information to injured or ill employees about work changes
- > Ensure relevant work areas are aware of employees who are on return to work programs (ensure privacy and confidentiality requirements are met)
- > Provide injured or ill employees with contact details of their new rehabilitation case manager
- > Consider other issues relating to specific rehabilitation programs that will be affected by organisational change
- > Ensure supervisors and team leaders are informed of any special needs for the employee and the work area is set up to accommodate these
- > Ensure the employee has been contacted and a meeting arranged with relevant stakeholders, such as treating practitioners and supervisor, to discuss any changes to the rehabilitation program
- > Ensure follow-up arrangements have been made with the employee and supervisor to provide ongoing support.

The following administrative processes apply to employees undertaking a return to work program under the *Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (SRC Act) who are affected by a **transfer of function to a new employer as part of a machinery of government change**. Organisations need to ensure that:

- > Rehabilitation delegations (SRC Act s. 41 (A)) have been reviewed
- > Return to work plans have been closed and new plans developed in consultation with stakeholders
- > Service provider arrangements allow the currently engaged Approved Rehabilitation Providers to provide ongoing return to work services
- > Arrangements have been put in place to ensure claimant files are securely transferred (ensuring privacy and confidentiality)
- > Any outstanding documents such as medical certificates, or reports waiting to be received or sent to Comcare are reviewed
- > New cost centres have been established for these functions with Comcare.

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OHS SYSTEMS – QUICK GUIDE:

HAVE EMPLOYEES BEEN MADE AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING?

| Workplace safety | Workplace Health and Safety Arrangements |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">> First Aid arrangements> Emergency procedures> Harassment Contact Officers> Incident and hazard reporting> Risk assessment procedures> Employee Assistance Program> Alcohol and drug policy> Safety training requirements> Hazards specific to workplace | <ul style="list-style-type: none">> Consultation processes for safety issues> Health and Safety Representatives in workplace> Designated Work Groups> Health and safety committee meetings> Harassment Contact Officer> OHS policies and procedures> Dispute resolution processes |

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FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information refer to the following:

- > Managing Change – Publication 30, June 06 edition
- > Recognition, resolution and recovery: early intervention to support psychological health and wellbeing. Publication 46, February 05 edition
- > The Management of Occupational Health and Safety in Commonwealth Agencies – Induction into the workplace – Publication 13, December 2007 edition
- > OHS Code of Practice 2008
- > Psychological Injury Portal

Available at www.comcare.gov.au

- > Implementing Machinery of Government Changes: A good practice guide
- > Agency Health: Monitoring Agency Health and Improving Performance

Available at www.apsc.gov.au

- > The Health and Safety Executive

Available at www.hse.gov.uk

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