DEFENCE OHS VISION

MESSAGE FROM THE DOHSC CHAIRMAN

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Copies of the Defence OHS Strategy and supporting documentation are available via the Defence OHS Portal
Through leadership and individual commitment, Defence will continue to place a high priority on the occupational health and safety (OHS) of its people, thus protecting them and enhancing capability and readiness. We aim to eliminate all preventable work-related injuries and illness through the systematic management of our risks. We will strive to make measurable improvement in our occupational health and safety performance through the implementation of the Defence OHS Strategy.”
The Defence OHS Strategy defines the strategic objectives that are required to achieve our desired OHS culture and deliver a high standard of OHS performance. It articulates our OHS policy and expected outcomes.

The Defence OHS Strategic Plan 2004-2006 identified three phases to achieve OHS improvement in Defence: Reposition, Reshape and Realise. The primary objective of this Defence OHS Strategy will be to reshape Defence OHS management and realise performance improvements. The foundation of this work is developing and implementing the elements of the Defence OHS Management System (OHSMS), a critical element of which is the OHS Management Information System (OHSMIS).

The Defence OHSMS provides a planned, documented and quantifiable approach for the comprehensive and systematic management of OHS. Our OHSMS encompasses the areas of leadership, incident prevention, incident management, and supporting management arrangements. It provides the architecture to embed a repeatable way of managing OHS that includes the integration of deliberate practices, processes and linkages, while remaining sufficiently flexible and responsive to meet changing demands.

We seek to move beyond a simple focus on legislative compliance and evolve into a values-based, learning organisation. Thus, proactively managing all workplace hazards to protect our people across the spectrum of activities we are engaged in including deployments, operations and working at Defence facilities. Our Defence values guide the behaviour of our people, at every level of the organisation, and will underpin our desired OHS culture. We will have achieved our desired OHS culture when:

- All Defence personnel, Australian Defence Force Cadets and Contractors apply value based decisions that contribute to a Defence wide safe and healthy work environment.
- OHS is recognised as a force multiplier by its inherent link to force preservation and sustainability of operations, and is embedded in all capability development, acquisition, contracting, design, operational planning, operations and business activities.
- Accurate OHS information is captured and disseminated in an effective and timely manner through integrated systems and is used in decision making.
- All personnel accept responsibility for their occupational health and safety, and that of others in the workplace, and regard it as an integral part of the daily working routine.
- Innovative, healthy and safe work practices are supported through appropriate reward and recognition.
- Emphasis is given to identifying root causes of incidents, taking preventive action, and ensuring lessons are learned.

As Chair of the DOHSC, I will support implementation of this Strategy by:

- coordinating the development and maintenance of the Defence OHSMS to achieve effective implementation within individual Services and Groups;
- ensuring the OHSMS supports joint and interagency operations;
- aiding the Services and Groups to translate corporate improvement initiatives into actions that effectively meet their individual OHS management requirements;
- assisting the Services to develop approaches for managing OHS in joint operational environments;
- working collaboratively with the Services and Groups to identify and address common OHS management issues;
- guiding development of policy and practices for OHS hazard and risk management that are understandable and effective;
- ensuring, as chair of the DOHSC, that proposals for improved OHS management are appropriately considered and funded; and
- coordinating corporate level OHS initiatives, concentrating on the highest priority improvements that can be achieved within available resources.

Allocation of resources to meet the priorities of this Strategy will be addressed through Service and Group budget estimates processes, the Defence Management and Finance Plan, the Defence Workforce Plan and, in respect of corporate initiatives, funding from DOHSC. In developing our OHS capability we also need to recruit and develop OHS professionals, specialists and representatives to play key roles in OHS management.

Major General Mick Slater, DSC, AM, CSC
Chairman,
Defence Occupational Health and Safety Committee
The Defence OHS Strategy is consistent with Defence’s existing governance arrangements. These arrangements are reflected in the Ministerial Directive to the Secretary and CDF and cascade down to the Service Chiefs and Group Heads through Charter Letters and Organisational Performance Agreements. Customer Service Agreements provide the mechanism for documenting inter-Service/Group arrangements, and provide the accountability framework for directing and controlling performance in Defence. OHS is integral to delivering capability and is implicit within these governance arrangements.

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The Defence Committee’s (DC) role is to make decisions aimed at achieving the outcomes specified in the Ministerial Directive to the CDF and Secretary. The DC focuses on the longer term, giving direction and assessing performance in delivering results.

The Defence Occupational Health and Safety Committee (DOHSC) is a DC sub-committee responsible for overseeing the Defence OHS Strategy and supporting activities. The Chair of the DOHSC is responsible and accountable to the Secretary and CDF, the designated employers under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 1991. The DOHSC reports to the DC on significant OHS issues and annual progress with implementing the Defence OHS Strategy.

The Chair of the DOHSC is also the principal OHS policy adviser to the DC and is responsible for providing a corporate OHS policy and governance framework.

Service Chiefs and Group Heads are responsible for the OHS performance of their respective organisations and reporting to the DOHSC. OHS performance to meet statutory reporting requirements, including the Defence Annual Report, is coordinated through the Occupational Health, Safety and Compensation Branch.
The primary role of Defence is to provide Government with military options for the conduct of operations to defend Australia and its national interests. This responsibility, together with the demanding and complex nature of the Defence environment, gives rise to challenges in meeting our obligation to make Defence a safe workplace for our people.

First, there is the challenge created by the size and geographic spread of the Defence workforce. The Defence workforce is made up of over 100,000 personnel, comprised of:

- permanent and reserve force members of the Navy, Army and Air Force, together with the cadets from each of the Services; civilian employees engaged in an ongoing or non-ongoing (temporary) capacity under the Public Service Act 1999; and
- private sector contractors working throughout, and frequently embedded within, the Defence workforce.

In addition to working throughout Australia, from major metropolitan and rural centres to remote localities, our people are deployed on operations overseas, and work in overseas missions, embassies and posts throughout the world.

There is vast diversity in the nature of work performed by Defence personnel. Military personnel are engaged in ‘warlike’, ‘non-warlike’ and ‘peacetime’ operations, including peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations, as well as training for such operations. While initial operational training is conducted under the auspices of the individual Services, we are increasingly mounting joint ADF operations and frequently in coalition with overseas military forces.

Support activities performed across Defence by both military and civilian personnel encompass an extensive range of functions and employment categories, including scientific, engineering, technical, logistical and administrative support together with policy development and planning. It is fair to say that Defence has a greater range of employment categories than any other Australian employer.

Overriding all of this, are the risks - in some cases, extreme risks - associated with the nature of military service. The principal distinguishing feature of military service is, of course, the obligation to serve in combat operations. No other employment group has the same liability. Increased operational tempo as a result of participation in peacekeeping and overseas coalition operations has highlighted this obligation and the inherent risks involved in deployed operations.

Despite our desire and best efforts to do so, the risks inherent in military service can never be completely removed. Other than the obvious risks associated with operational service, ADF training activities are aimed at exercising military skills in simulated combat situations, which by necessity leads to elevated risk environments, albeit where the risks are controlled to the maximum extent practicable. Moreover, many military activities require personnel to work long and irregular hours of duty in adverse or arduous conditions, thus compounding the risks.

Within this large and diverse employment environment the ability to sustain our most important asset - Our People - is paramount. Accordingly OHS becomes a capability enhancer of crucial importance to all personnel. In addition, and notwithstanding the unique nature of military service, Defence is not immune from complying with the OHS Act and related legislation. While the demands made of Defence and its personnel may at times be higher than for the rest of the Australian workforce, the standards relating to OHS remain the same as for the wider community.
Against this background, it is considered that in the short to medium term the following issues will have implications for the management of OHS within Defence:

- The expectations of those entering, or already working in Defence, together with the expectations of Government and wider community, are likely to increase insofar as the effective management of OHS is concerned. This can be expected to have a direct bearing on Defence’s reputation and, therefore, our ability to attract, recruit and retain quality people.

- Operational tempo is unlikely to diminish, and may increase, in response to changes in the international security environment or the Government’s strategic Defence policy. The instability being experienced within our own region may increase, potentially leading to further regional deployments. Increased operational activity invariably leads to heightened OHS risks for our people.

- Pressures within the Australian labour market, combined with substantial demographic shifts, will continue to constrain Defence’s capacity to attract high quality recruits to the ADF and the civilian workforce.

- The large-scale acquisition of new platforms and equipment, coupled with the potential for significant new occupational hazards associated with emerging technologies, can be expected to generate new OHS challenges.

- High operational tempo along with a constant drive to achieve greater productivity and improved performance across the Defence workforce may lead to increased psychological injuries.

The preceding factors suggest increasing demands will be made in relation to the management of OHS, a prediction consistent with the growing importance of OHS over the last two decades. These factors indicate Defence will face continuing pressure to reduce the frequency and severity of work related injuries and illnesses among Defence personnel in order to maintain our existing levels of capability while containing costs.
The first, or ‘Reposition’ edition of the Defence OHS Strategic Plan 2004-2006 established 8 priority areas for action, broadly grouped into outcome priorities and enabling priorities. We have made progress during the ‘Reposition’ phase of the ‘Strategic Plan’, agreeing the Defence OHSMS as the enterprise-level architecture for managing OHS and defining roles and responsibilities. As we transition to the ‘Reshaping’ phase, a review of the priorities contained in the Defence OHS Strategic Plan 2004-2006 reveals that the initial thinking was sound. The original 8 Priorities have been recast as Strategic Objectives and prioritised to better focus our efforts.

**Foundation Objectives**

1. Further develop and implement the elements of the Defence-wide OHSMS.

2. Develop and implement a Defence OHS Management Information System to improve the quality of OHS information available to decision-makers at all levels.

**Outcome Objectives**

3. Reduce the frequency and severity of risks to people’s health and safety.

4. Improve prevention of occupational injury, illness and disease.

5. Reduce the impact of occupational injury, illness and disease.

**Enabling Objectives**

6. Train, support and motivate personnel to identify and manage hazards effectively.

7. Improve and embed a systematic capability to identify, eliminate or manage hazards in the design and planning stages of Defence activities.

8. Enable Defence personnel to manage the OHS performance of third parties, consistent with Defence policies and practices.

The Defence Strategic Objectives are explained in greater detail in the following pages.
FOUNDATION OBJECTIVES

Strategic Objectives 1 and 2 are called Foundation Objectives as it has been decided that:

- The OHSMS (Strategic Objective 1) is the underlying basis for all implementation activity at the corporate level. While establishing minimum standards and common outcomes, it will allow practices to be tailored to Service and Groups specific requirements. The development of a systematic OHS capability, which is integrated with related Defence management frameworks and based on a risk management approach, provides a foundation on which to improve our OHS performance.

- To enable commanders and managers to be effective in their planning, leadership and decision-making they must have access to timely and accurate information. Provision of an enterprise-based management information system (Strategic Objective 2) to support decision-makers is therefore the second foundation objective.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

Further develop and implement the elements of the Defence-wide OHSMS

The ability of Defence to sustain improvements in OHS performance is dependent on developing an effective OHSMS, and supportive culture.

External research reveals that best practice organisations adopt a consistent, systematic approach to managing OHS, focusing on occupational health promotion and hazard elimination as the underlying purpose of OHS systems. Further, it indicates that a positive OHS culture (the acceptance of OHS as a core organisational value in the minds of leaders, staff and contractors) is required in support of a robust OHS management system if enduring performance improvement is to be achieved.

The Defence OHSMS purpose is to create a sustainable capability through a comprehensive and integrated architecture where the Services and Groups can manage the risks arising from Defence activities. It must also enable risks to be managed effectively across organisational boundaries.

The Key Strategies for Objective 1 are:

- The Defence OHSMS will have principles-based policies and implementation plans that are adaptable to the needs of the Services and Groups - so that their individual OHS management system can be configured to support integration with the Defence OHSMS.

- Gaps between current practice and OHSMS requirements will be identified and implementation plans developed for each Service and Group, and Defence as a whole.

- The mechanisms to drive cultural change, including the role of education and training, communications, recognition and reward, will be determined and appropriate actions incorporated into implementation plans.
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

**Develop and implement a Defence OHS Management Information System to improve the quality of OHS information available to decision-makers at all levels**

Commanders and Managers require accurate and timely OHS information to manage and report OHS performance effectively, ensure compliance with statutory requirements and apply their resources for maximum effect. The ability to initiate timely interventions depends on receiving information on relevant lead indicators of performance.

Defence must improve its capacity to detect recurring incidents and learn from experience. Methods that enable the sharing of information, lessons learned and technical OHS knowledge across Services and Groups will be developed.

Strategic Objective 2 is intended to improve the quality, timeliness and accessibility of OHS information.

**The Key Strategies for Objective 2 are:**

- An enterprise-level OHS Management Information System (OHSMIS), based on the Defence OHSMIS, will be designed, developed and implemented. It will provide Defence wide performance information allowing trend analysis within the Services and Groups, and aggregation for whole-of-Defence performance analysis and reporting.

- OHS performance targets will be determined, within the Services and Groups and across the whole-of-Defence, where they perform a useful purpose in driving improvement.
Strategic Objectives 3, 4 & 5 emphasise how Defence can manage the OHS impacts of our activities and their effect on people.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:**

**Reduce the frequency and severity of risks to people’s health and safety**

At the whole-of-Defence level more effective mechanisms to systematically identify and manage our most significant hazards are needed. The National OHS Strategy 2002-2012, together with Defence Boards of Inquiry and Comcare investigations, highlight specific sources of risk that require further attention, including organisational risks that may lead to systemic failures.

Strategic Objective 3 is focused on improving the identification and management of those Defence OHS risks requiring urgent attention.

The Key Strategies for Objective 3 are:

- Develop a corporate risk management register encompassing hazard types, areas affected and likely impacts, in order to drive hazard management activity.
- Review key sources of information to identify those risks most requiring attention, and develop and implement appropriate action plans.
- Develop an organisational incident model that allows analysis of selected incidents, with findings influencing broader OHS improvement efforts.
- Review OHS risks in the joint operational environment and develop processes to manage these effectively.
- Examine OHS risk management at multi-tenanted sites, consider the influence of command and control structures, and develop processes to manage risks that cross Service and Group boundaries.
- Identify OHS specialists to provide the DOHSC, commanders and managers with expert advice to inform decision-making.
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Improve prevention of occupational injury, illness and disease

Poor work practices or inadequate risk appreciation often lead to physical injury with a resultant absence from the workplace and reduction in personnel capability. This includes in particular Defence personnel undertaking training activities. It may also include personnel working in office-based environments and workshops, despite these generally being viewed as benign or low risk environments.

Exposure to hazards such as chemicals and radiation may lead to non-specific symptoms, long latency or insidious occupational illnesses and diseases. Further, medical and other health professionals require appropriate occupational medicine competencies and workplace health knowledge. These are not routinely provided as part of health qualification training, resulting in a poor understanding of likely and reported occupational exposures and the use of inappropriate health surveillance. In the absence of appropriate health surveillance programs, these impacts may be difficult to detect and treat in a timely manner.

In the deployed context, commanders must ensure that troops are not unnecessarily exposed to environmental and industrial hazards.

The Defence Centre for Occupational Health ensures that Defence adopts a strategic focus on preventing occupational illness and disease while also managing the consequences to our people.

The Key Strategies for Objective 4 are:

- Systematically identify exposures to occupational health hazards and eliminate or reduce the risks to an acceptable level.
- Establish Defence policy for the provision of occupational medicine and industrial hygiene support, concentrating on high risk areas including deployed and industrial environments.
- Progressively implement appropriate health surveillance programs, including relevant biological and environmental monitoring of workplaces.
- Implement programs to enhance physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Undertake continuing research to identify emerging issues in occupational illness and disease.
- Systematically identify the principle sources of occupational injury to Defence personnel, prioritise them and develop strategies to reduce the incidence of injury.
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:

Reduce the impact of occupational injury, illness and disease

Prevention is the primary objective of Defence’s approach to OHS management. However, when OHS incidents occur there can be significant long-term personnel, operational, financial and reputation impacts which need to be managed. At any point in time, a significant number of military personnel are deemed unfit for deployment as a result of injuries occurring during operations or training. This ultimately impacts on military capability and compensation costs.

Objective 5 recognises the occupational injury, illness and disease severity of impact can be minimised if the type, level and speed of response is appropriate. Its focus is achieving the prompt and safe return to duty of injured or ill personnel by ensuring that appropriate treatment, rehabilitation and return-to-work processes are in place.

The Key Strategies for Objective 5 are:

> Defence rehabilitation and compensation processes, together with clear and accepted responsibilities, will be fully embedded in human resource management practices.

> Policies to manage ill or injured personnel will be developed and implemented.

> The capability and financial impacts of occupational injuries, illness and disease will be reduced through implementation of targeted response strategies.

> Programs providing appropriate care and support to ill or injured personnel will be developed and implemented.
ENABLING OBJECTIVES

Strategic Objectives 6 - 8 focus on enabling Defence to deliver the OHS outcome objectives:

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6:

Train, support and motivate personnel to identify and manage hazards effectively

Leadership in OHS is critical to enable the effective implementation of OHS improvements.

Leaders must ensure that people are equipped with the appropriate skills throughout their careers to effectively identify and manage workplace risks. They must encourage the prompt reporting of hazards, particularly by junior personnel, who are often the first to be aware of them. Additionally, leaders must seek assurance that occupational hazards in their organisations are being identified and managed.

Objective 6 is focused on clarifying responsibilities, developing appropriate competencies, delivering specialist support, and providing assurance to management for hazard identification and management.

The Key Strategies for Objective 6 are:

- OHS roles and responsibilities are clarified, and aligned with resources and accountabilities.
- Comprehensive OHS risk management policies are established and applied.
- OHS leadership competencies are defined, and appropriate development, monitoring and motivational strategies implemented to ensure leadership is an active component driving behavioural change.
- Relevant OHS education and training will be established and maintained, including:
  - induction procedures for supervisors in critical, hazardous and high risk areas;
  - hazard identification and management skills for leaders and managers; and
  - occupational medicine principles education is available to all medical officers providing health care at Defence establishments.
- Specialist Defence science and technology expertise is available and involved in hazard identification and management.
- Systematic OHS audits are conducted within the Services and Groups to ensure hazard identification and management processes and practices are effective.
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 7:

Improve, consolidate and embed the capability to identify, eliminate and manage hazards in the design and planning stages

A general principle of effective OHS management is the source of risks are proactively identified and eliminated. This requires OHS aspects to be considered early in capability development, acquisition, support and change management processes to allow the elimination of potential hazards. Consequently, OHS considerations need to be fully integrated into the capability development life cycle.

The responsibility for identifying and eliminating hazards extends beyond the design of equipment and materiel to encompass the design of work processes and organisational change. Consequently, it falls on a wide range of parties including policy makers, capability staff, engineers, designers, manufacturers, operators, contractors, suppliers and maintainers.

Objective 7 focuses on the continuing requirement to improve safety in design.

The Key Strategies for Objective 7 are:

> Policies and processes will be developed and implemented to ensure that OHS is adequately and consistently addressed in all Defence capability and infrastructure acquisitions from conception to disposal.

> Having identified, assessed and eliminated or controlled hazards during the design and acquisition phase this information will then be used throughout service life to ensure proactive, effective and informed hazard management.

> Processes in place to ensure refits and modifications include reviews of OHS hazards to identify and manage hazards, and where required action plans are developed.
Enable Defence personnel to manage the OHS performance of third parties, consistent with Defence policies and practices. Defence is increasingly reliant on third parties for the provision of goods and services, and as a result has potentially significant attendant OHS risks to manage. Contractor activities can pose potential risks to a wide range of people, including Defence personnel, third party personnel, sub-contractors and the public. Within Defence controlled environments it is critical that we develop and implement OHS processes and performance standards, for ourselves and third parties. There is also much that we can learn from our commercial partners.

Objective 7 seeks to develop practical approaches to enable the growth and management of safe and healthy working practices in our relationships with third parties. It will strengthen the OHS elements of contracting arrangements to ensure Defence’s influence on OHS outcomes is commensurate with the risks involved. It seeks to ensure the more explicit consideration of OHS requirements during tendering, negotiation and contract administration.

The Key Strategies for Objective 8 are:

- OHS performance standards and review mechanisms will be agreed and included in all new Defence contracts.
- Procedures will be developed to ensure selection process includes a review of OHS performance against Defence standards.
- Procedures will be implemented to ensure contract administration includes periodic review of OHS performance against contract terms and Defence standards.
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