

SRC Commission

The Management of Occupational Health and Safety in Commonwealth Agencies

competency-based
occupational health and
safety training



Australian Government

Comcare

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Guidance material on competency-based occupational health and safety training

Foreword

This guidance material is intended to build on the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission's (SRCC) Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Risk Management Model.

The model reflects the Commission's view that the most efficient and effective way to create and maintain a healthy and safe work environment is for Commonwealth agencies to integrate OHS risk management into their daily business operations.

The OHS Risk Management Model underpins the basic OHS infrastructure prescribed in the *Occupational Health and Safety (Commonwealth Employment) Act 1991* (the OHS (CE) Act). It is suitable for application in both large and small organisations, in all work environments and for the prevention of any type of work related injury and/or disease.

The Model provides six general principles for the integration of OHS risk management into an organisation's daily business operations. These principles are:

- Senior management leadership and commitment;
- Active involvement of each individual in the workplace;
- Effective communication through consultation;
- Provision of appropriate information, education and training;
- Hazard identification, risk assessment and risk control at workplace level; and
- Development and implementation of OHS management information systems.

This material builds on SRCC advice already available on OHS Management Systems and provides:

- guidance on where OHS competency standards fit within both the OHS framework and the national industry training framework;
- suggestions about integrating OHS competencies within the workplace; and
- directions towards resources which agencies can use to develop competency-based OHS training programs aligned with their core business.

The SRCC considers that competency-based OHS training can be delivered most effectively in the context of competency-based training for the core business functions of the agency. To the extent that it may be necessary to provide regulation and direction, this will be within the guidelines laid down in the Commission's Principles of Regulation, which focus on outcomes rather than prescription of process.

1 Introduction

1.1 Title

- 1.1.1 This document may be cited as the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission Guidance Material on Competency-based Occupational Health and Safety Training*.

1.2 Purpose

- 1.2.1 To assist employers to meet their responsibilities under the OHS(CE) Act by providing guidance on resources available to support development and implementation of competency-based OHS training programs by Commonwealth employers.

1.3 Definition

- 1.3.1 For the purposes of this material, "competency" refers to the skills and knowledge agreed by Australian industries to be needed for effective performance in the workplace.

2 What are OHS competencies?

2.1 General

2.1.1 OHS competencies are the competencies required to implement an effective OHS management system consistent with OHS legislative requirements throughout Australia.

2.2 NOHSC Guidelines

2.2.1 In November 1998, the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC) published the second edition of its *National Guidelines for Integrating Occupational Health and Safety Competencies into National Industry Competency Standards*.

The NOHSC Guidelines provide a range of generic OHS competencies which are described as minimum competencies for the implementation of effective OHS management in Australian workplaces. A summary of the generic competencies is at **Schedule 1**. The Guidelines encourage the incorporation of these competencies into industry competency standards. There are three different "units" of competence, relevant for different levels of responsibility in the workplace:

- i) Employees without management or supervisory responsibility;
- ii) Employees with supervisory responsibilities;
- iii) Employees with management responsibilities.

These guidelines were developed in conjunction with NOHSC stakeholders and ANTA.

2.3 National Industry Training Framework

2.3.1 The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA)

ANTA is an industry-based board, whose mission is:

"To ensure that the skills of the Australian labour force are sufficient to support internationally competitive commerce and industry and to provide individuals with opportunities to optimise their potential."

ANTA supports the development of competency standards, assessment guidelines and qualifications frameworks through Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs).

2.3.2 Commonwealth Agencies and the National Industry Training Framework

As indicated above, the national industry training framework is primarily directed towards ensuring internationally competitive Australian commerce and industry. While its primary focus is not on the public sector, training packages developed for specific industries within the framework may provide useful guidance on the integration of OHS competencies with competencies required for the work of the agency. For example, Business Services Training Australia and the Information Services and Telecommunications ITAB are organisations which may be able to assist with guidance.

2.3.3 PSETA

The National Public Services Training Package developed by Public Service Education and Training Australia (PSETA) include specific OHS competencies for the public sector. These are modelled on generic standards published by NOHSC and described at **Schedule 1**.

Further information on PSETA's work is in section 4 of this guidance material.

2.3.4 OHS Competencies in the Workplace

Competency standards endorsed by PSETA and ITABs vary in their treatment of OHS issues. Agencies will need to ensure that standards which are adopted take appropriate account of OHS implications of the work of the agency.

3 OHS competencies with the OHS framework

3.1 Employers' Duty of Care

3.1.1 Legislated Requirement

Paragraph 16(2)(e) of the OHS (CE) Act requires employers:

"to provide to the employees, in appropriate languages, the information, instruction, training and supervision necessary to enable them to perform their work in a manner that is safe and without risk to their health."

This requirement is integral to the employer's general duty of care under section 16 and is considered in the context of the Planned Investigation Program, which is discussed below.

3.1.2 Other Employer Duties

Hazard-based regulations and codes of practice issued under the OHS (CE) Act, as well as SRCC guidance material, include requirements for training of employees and contractors.

3.2 OHS Management Systems (OHSMS)

3.2.1 The SRCC/Comcare Guide

The Guide published by the SRCC and Comcare *Establishing an OHS Management System* provides agencies with practical help in establishing and maintaining an OHSMS and on how to integrate OHS management systems into every aspect of an agency's core business.

The Guide is available on the OHS publications page on Comcare's web site at (<http://www.comcare.gov.au>).

3.2.2 Competencies within OHSMS

An OHSMS represents a systematic management approach that can assist in meeting legal requirements and lead to sustained improvement in OHS performance. Effective implementation and maintenance of an OHSMS is dependent on the competency of an organisation's people.

For an OHSMS to be effective, managers at all levels need to be knowledgeable about their legislative obligations and the risks and hazards specific to their organisation. Employees need to be competent to handle their assigned task, particularly where there may be a significant risk or hazard present.

Suggested ways of developing OHS competency standards within an OHSMS include:

- using existing industry competency standards;
- examining job or position descriptions;
- analysing work tasks;
- analysing results of inspections and audits;
- reviewing incident reports.

3.2.3 OHSMS in the Workplace

The SRC Commission and Comcare strongly support the adoption of a suitable OHSMS in each agency. However, agencies should be aware that one of the principal reasons why an OHSMS can fail to make the expected impact on workplace health and safety is that it may become a "paper system": a complex set of procedures which are not translated into practical or sustained action.

For this reason, agencies need to continue, after initial adoption of an OHSMS, to put effort into implementation, review and monitoring of its effectiveness.

One way of helping to keep the OHSMS alive and practical is to integrate OHS competencies into the competencies required to be developed for the core business of the agency.

3.3 Competence and OHS Outcomes

3.3.1 The Effects of Employee Training

It is clear that agencies will not achieve positive OHS outcomes unless there are programs in place which enable employees to carry out their work safely. Within these programs, which will include elements of a variety of risk management measures, it is difficult to identify objectively how employee training programs relate directly to changes in outcomes. Nevertheless, instruction in safe work practices should form an integral part of an agency's training for core business.

Where appropriate, for example in an environment with exposure to identified hazards, this training may require assessment of competency before an employee takes up duty. Assessment in a competency-based training system is criterion-referenced. The aim of criterion-referenced assessment is to identify individuals' achievement of defined outcomes, rather than relating their performance to that of other learners.

Competency-based training is valuable in providing operational, technical and trade skills and has benefits including:

- Learning and assessing on-the-job;
- Relevant and specific skills;
- specified standards;
- Uniform outcomes;
- Recognised training; and
- Workforce accountability and workplace management.

All these benefits should be expected to have a positive impact on OHS outcomes, but it must be recognised that competency-based training also has certain limitations, for example in providing generic skills such as communication or attitudinal/behavioural change.

In addition, competency-based training is restricted in considering understood and experiential knowledge.

3.3.2 The Effects of Manager Commitment & Training

As indicated in the Foreword to this material, the first principle of the SRCC's Risk Management Model is "Senior management leadership and commitment". Manager commitment has long been recognised as a prerequisite to improving OHS outcomes and is a necessary first step in establishing an OHSMS. Commitment will be practically demonstrated by (among other things) allocation of an appropriate level of resources to OHS training programs.

A report for NOHSC, "CEO and Supervisor Drivers", identified individual management training as a possible pathway for reinforcing the OHS accountability of supervisors. Training will assist managers in effectively attending to OHS issues and systematically managing safety. Risk management, hazard awareness and risk perception are important components for supervisor training.

It should be noted that management education and commitment needs to be continually renewed. For example, the Warden's Report into the Moura No 2 Mine disaster stated, "even if we had the 'improved' education in place it cannot be assumed that it will survive forever". Continued professional development and improved professional status for OHS education would encourage the continual improvement of knowledge in managers.

4 Integrating OHS competencies in the workplace

4.1 Assessment of Competency

4.1.1 A first step in the integration of OHS competencies in the workplace is the establishment of target standards to be achieved and comparison of existing standards with those targets.

Initial assessment of existing standards of OHS competency within the agency can be achieved through a number of techniques, including readily-available sources:

- Risk assessments;
- Any Planned Investigation Program (PIP) reports provided by Comcare;
- Accident and incident reports;
- Internal agency OHS audits;
- Purpose-designed surveys.

4.2 Development of Training Programs

4.2.1 The range and complexity of competency-based OHS training programs which an agency will need to develop will depend on a range of factors, including:

- The size and risk profile of the agency;
- The level of sophistication of the agency's OHSMS;
- Commitments within agency OHS Agreements;
- The existing level of attainment of OHS competencies by agency staff.

Agencies will also need to consider how various styles and types of training are suited to the particular circumstances of their working environment. For example, are OHS competencies in the agency best attained through formal training sessions, through external courses or through on-the-job training?

4.3 Contributions from other Agencies

4.3.1 Learning by Example

A number of agencies, particularly larger organisations with ready access to both training and OHS resources, have done extensive work on competency-based OHS training programs. In most cases the programs will be specific to the work of the agency: for example, an agency with large scale manual handling requirements will focus their programs on prevention of manual handling injuries.

Agencies may be willing to share their experience in development and implementation of competency-based programs, and this experience may be adaptable to the needs of another agency.

(It should be noted that information on agency programs may be available only on a commercial basis in some cases.)

4.3.2 Networks

It is advisable for agencies to take advantage of the experience of organisations outside the Commonwealth and outside the public sector, where possible. (Links to public sector organisations are available through the Comcare web site (<http://www.comcare.gov.au/>)). Both formal and informal consultative networks are useful in supporting agencies' training programs. The OHS professional bodies in each State and Territory, in particular, provide valuable forums for the exchange of information and advice. The following are relevant contact details:

Organisation

Contact Details

Safety Institute of Australia

Admin Manager
National Admin Manager
PO Box 2078
Gladstone Park VIC 3043
Phone: (03) 8336 1995
Fax: 03 8336 1995
E-mail: natadmin@sia.org.au

Australian and New Zealand
Society of Occupational Medicine

PO Box 304
Collins Street West
Melbourne VIC 8007
Ph: 1300 666 515
Fax: (03) 9629 5944
E-mail: anzsom@aol.com.au
(www.anzsom.org.au/)

Australian Institute of Occupational
Hygienists Organisation

PO Box 1205
Tullamarine VIC 3043
Ph: (03) 9335 2577
Fax: (03) 9335 3454
E-mail: aiohcc@ibm.net
(www.aioh.org.au/contactM.htm)

Ergonomics Society of Australia

Creeda Business Centre
281 Goyder Street
Narrabundah ACT 2604
Ph: (02) 6295 5959
Fax: (02) 6295 5946
E-mail: secretariate@ergonomics.org.au

Other networks which agencies may find valuable include employer and employee organisations (links to individual employee organisations are accessible through the ACTU web site):

Organisation	Contact Details
Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	OHS Manager PO Box 18008 Collins Street East Melbourne VIC 8003 Ph: (03) 9668 9950 Fax: (03) 9668 9958 E-mail: melb@acci.org.au (www.acci.asn.au/contacts.htm)
Australian Industry Group	PO Box 289 North Sydney NSW 2059 Ph: (02) 9466 5566 Fax: (02) 9466 5599 Freecall: 1800 648 859 (www.aigroup.asn.au/contacts.html)
Australian Council of Trades Unions	North Wing, Trades Hall Level 2 393 Swanston Street Melbourne VIC 3000 Ph: (03) 9663 5266 Fax: (03) 9663 4051 E-mail: mailbox@actu.asn.au

4.4 Published Material

4.4.1 NOHSC

The NOHSC web site contains a national directory of OHS education and training resources:

(<http://www.nohsc.gov.au/work/education/index.htm>)

The site contains education and training materials, for example the guide *Small Business Management Training: Integrating Health and Safety Competencies*:

(<http://www.nohsc.gov.au/work/education/sbetrain.exec.htm>)

The site also provides access to NOHSC publications:

(<http://www.nohsc.gov.au/publications/index.htm>)

Agencies are particularly directed to the publications *OHS Competency Based Training and Organising Health and Safety Training for your Workplace*.

4.4.2 ANTA

The ANTA web site (<http://www.anta.gov.au/>) describes the national industry training framework and provides links to ITAB sites.

The site also contains links to ANTA publications: (<http://www.anta.gov.au/PUBS/ALALLPUBS1.asp>). These may be useful to agencies as a source of guidance on development of programs specific to the work of each agency within the broader context of the framework.

4.4.3 PSETA

The PSETA web site (<http://www.pseta.com.au/>) provides information on the National Public Services Training Package as well as contacts for members of all Commonwealth, State and Territory jurisdictions who are represented on PSETA.

There is also detailed information at (<http://www.pseta.com.au/>) on public sector OHS competency standards at three levels:

- Follow Defined OHS Policy and Procedures;
- Implement and Monitor the Organisation's OHS Policies, Procedures and Programs; and
- Establish, Maintain & Evaluate the Organisation's OHS System.

These levels generally reflect the units of competence described in the NOHSC Guidelines.

4.4.4 Comcare

The Comcare web site (<http://www.comcare.gov.au/>) provides access to a wide range of material specifically intended for agencies in the Commonwealth jurisdiction.

The "Publications" area of the site enables agencies to obtain direct access to the bulk of OHS material published by Comcare: (<http://www.comcare.gov.au/publications/index.html>). The area includes access to publications on such issues as agencies' duties under the OHS (CE) Act, risks and hazards, certification and OHS management, as well as guidance on OHS training programs (including induction of new employees) at the agency level.

4.4.5 State & Territory Jurisdictions

Each State and Territory OHS jurisdiction maintains a web site with access to OHS material. Links to each of these sites are available from the Comcare site and each contains appropriate contact details.

4.5 Investigations and Reports

4.5.1 Planned Investigation Program

The Planned Investigation Program (PIP) is a structured process conducted by Comcare under the OHS (CE) Act which provides a detailed assessment of an agency's OHS management system against a range of criteria. A report is provided to the agency involved including, where appropriate, recommendations for improvement.

PIP reports can be a valuable resource for agencies wishing to bring focus to a competency-based OHS training program. Agencies may wish to contact their local Comcare Regional Office or Comcare's Operations and Investigations Group to discuss ways of taking full advantage of PIP findings and recommendations.

The audit tool used by Comcare for the PIP (SafetyMAP) includes provision for review of the agency's OHS training program. Further details are available on the Comcare site at (<http://www.comcare.gov.au/ohs/2/pip.html>)

4.5.2 Internal OHS Audits

Agencies' internal audits of their OHS management systems may provide specifically for assessment of the status and effectiveness of OHS training programs. Audit reports may also provide a useful resource for bringing focus to competency-based OHS training programs.

4.5.3 Accident and Incident Investigations

Investigation of an accident or incident (dangerous occurrence) in the workplace often reveals multiple causes of the occurrence. Key factors which may come into play include combined shortcomings in safety competency and competency in work skills.

It is important that agencies review reports on accidents and incidents carefully to identify and correct contributing factors related to competency in safety or work skills.

4.6 Training Delivery

4.6.1 In-house or Outsourced?

While training of employees is a key element of employers' duty of care under the OHS (CE) Act, few agencies have the resources to deliver specialised training in areas such as OHS, particularly where unusual hazards or risks are concerned. Agencies may therefore need to consider the availability of suitable external resources for training program delivery.

4.6.2 Training Providers

Short course training is often available through:

- employer bodies and industry associations;
- trade unions & their organisations eg. State/Territory Trades & Labour Councils;
- private OHS service organisations; and
- training consultants.

It is suggested that agencies take particular care, in contracting with providers of OHS training, that the training offered meets the special needs of the agency and can be suitably integrated with training for the agency's core business.

Further information on the range of training available through a variety of sources, both for short courses and professional/technical education, can be accessed through the NOHSC web site at

(<http://www.nohsc.gov.au/OHSInformation/EducationAndTraining/default/html>)

5 Monitoring and review

5.1 Stocktaking

5.1.1 It is suggested that agencies examine the extent to which they are already making use of available resources relating to OHS competencies. This will provide a benchmark to assist them to assess whether the guidance material is useful to them and to identify improvements to OHS outcomes which they may achieve through implementation of future competency-based training programs.

Feedback from agencies will assist Comcare to assess the usefulness of this guidance material to its intended audience and continuously improve it to meet agencies' requirements.

5.2 Review

5.2.1 It would be appropriate for Comcare to review progress periodically after publication of the guidance material, in the context of regular reporting on the Planned Investigation Program and the Prevention Program. This can be done by comparing results achieved on the relevant element of the SafetyMap audit tool.

Schedule 1

Table 1--Summary of generic occupational health and safety competency A and underpinning knowledge and skills

Generic competency A

Follow defined occupational health and safety policies and procedures relating to the work being undertaken in order to ensure own safety and that of others in the workplace.

Units and Elements of Competency

Elements

A.1 Follow workplace procedures for hazard identification and risk control.

A.2 Contribute to participative arrangements for the management of occupational health and safety.

Underpinning Knowledge and Skills

Knowledge and Skills

- Legal rights and responsibilities.
- The way occupational health and safety is managed in the workplace and legal requirements.
- Workplace hazards.
- Preferred ways to control risks.
- Occupational health and safety procedures.
- Occupational health and safety symbols and signs.
- Workplace designated occupational health and safety personnel

Table 2--Summary of generic occupational health and safety competency B and underpinning knowledge and skills

Generic competency B

Implement and monitor the organisation’s occupational health and safety policies, procedures and programs in the relevant work area to achieve and maintain occupational health and safety standards.

Units and Elements of Competency

Elements

B.1 Provide information to the work group about occupational health and safety and the organisation's occupational health and safety policies, procedures and programs.

B.2 Implement and monitor participative arrangements for the management of occupational health and safety.

B.3 Implement and monitor the organisation's procedures for identifying hazards and assessing risks.

B.4 Implement and monitor the organisation's procedures for controlling risks.

B.5 Implement the organisation's procedures for dealing with hazardous events.

B.6 Implement and monitor the organisation's procedures for providing occupational health and safety training.

B.7 Implement and monitor the organisation's procedures for maintaining occupational health and safety records.

Underpinning Knowledge and Skills

Knowledge

- Provisions of relevant occupational health and safety legislation.
- Principles and practice of effective occupational health and safety management.
- Workplace hazards, range and selection of control measures.
- Organisational occupational health and safety management systems and policies and procedures needed for legislative compliance.
- Impact of characteristics and composition of the workforce on occupational health and safety management.
- Relevance of occupational health and safety management to other organisational management policies, procedures and systems.

Skills

- Ability to analyse entire work environment and judge occupational health and safety interventions.
- Ability to analyse relevant workplace data.
- Ability to assess resources needed for risk control.

Table 3--Summary of generic occupational health and safety competency C and underpinning knowledge and skills

Generic competency C

Establish, maintain and evaluate the organisation’s occupational health and safety system in order to ensure that the workplace is, so far as is practicable, safe and without risks to the health of employees.

Units and Elements of Competency

Underpinning Knowledge and Skills

Elements

- C.1** Establish and maintain the framework for the occupational health and safety system in the area of managerial responsibility.
- C.2** Established and maintain participative arrangements for the management of occupational health and safety.
- C.3** Establish and maintain procedures for identifying hazards.
- C.4** Establish and maintain procedures for assessing risks.
- C.5** Establish and maintain procedures for controlling risks.
- C.6** Establish and maintain organisational procedures for dealing with hazardous events.
- C.7** Establish and maintain an occupational health and safety training program.
- C.8** Establish and maintain a system for occupational health and safety records.
- C.9** Evaluate the organisation's occupational health and safety system and related policies, procedures and programs.

Knowledge

- Provisions of relevant occupational health and safety legislation.
- Principles and practice of effective occupational health and safety management.
- Management arrangements relating to regulatory compliance.
- Enterprise hazards and risks, control measures and relevant expertise required.
- Characteristics and composition of workforce and their impact on OHS management.
- Relevance of enterprise management systems to OHS management.

Skills

- Ability to analyse working environment and design appropriate occupational health and safety management systems.
- Ability to analyse relevant data and evaluate occupational health and safety system effectiveness.
- Ability to assess resources to establish and maintain occupational health and safety management systems.

For further information contact

Comcare
GPO Box 9905
Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone - 1300 366 979

Email - ohs.help@comcare.gov.au

Internet - www.comcare.gov.au

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