



Australian Government
Comcare

WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY

Year in Review 2024



About the cover

The cover features moments in time from the 2024 Comcare National Conference, held in Canberra on 20–21 August. The conference brought together over 900 delegates from across Australia to focus on the theme 'Collaboration for prevention and change'. For more details, see page 8.

Contents

Overview	1
WHS incidents and enquiries data	2
Regulatory programs	4
WHS law reform	7
Events and engagement	8
Regulatory priorities 2024–2025	11



Overview

Welcome to the *Work Health and Safety Year in Review 2024*. The report outlines Comcare's compliance and enforcement activities to enable and promote safe and healthy work, and highlights broader government measures to strengthen work health and safety (WHS) across the diverse Commonwealth jurisdiction.

Law reform

Further important changes to the WHS legislative framework came into effect during 2024.

The Australian Government approved a new code of practice to support amended WHS laws on managing hazards and risks for workers' psychological health and safety. The Work Health and Safety (Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work) Code of Practice 2024 provides practical guidance on complying with health and safety duties associated with work-related psychosocial hazards and risks.

The new *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (WHS Act) offence of industrial manslaughter came into force to deter and punish the most serious law breaches causing workplace fatalities. The offence carries maximum penalties of \$18 million for bodies corporate or the Commonwealth and 25 years jail for individuals.

Supplying, processing and manufacturing engineered stone slabs, panels and benchtops became prohibited. The legislation makes it an offence to carry out, or direct or allow an employee to carry out, work involving the manufacture, supply, processing or installation of these products.

Compliance and enforcement

Comcare investigations resulted in 5 prosecutions under the WHS Act in 2024. The matters included a waste treatment plant fire that caused serious injuries to a worker, a child injured by a display at the National Science and Technology Centre, and 2 workers struck by a forklift at a road transport depot.

Comcare National Conference

Our biennial conference in Canberra attracted over 900 delegates, who came from across Australia to share best practice and explore new ways to create safer, healthier and more productive workplaces.

The event featured keynote addresses from former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins, journalist Stan Grant and interviewer and TV presenter Kirk Docker. More than 30 concurrent sessions over 2 days covered topics including WHS regulation, mental health, injury management and early intervention.

More than 140 Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) from around Australia attended the conference. Comcare staff presented 8 sessions including a HSR networking session. The event provided an opportunity for HSRs to share ideas and build relationships with colleagues, unions and Comcare inspectors.

HSR network

Comcare's HSR network has grown to more than 1,900 subscribers. Comcare's regular *HSR Network Highlights* newsletter raises awareness of guidance, Comcare's activities, and events for HSRs. We will continue to engage with HSRs and support their important work in WHS.

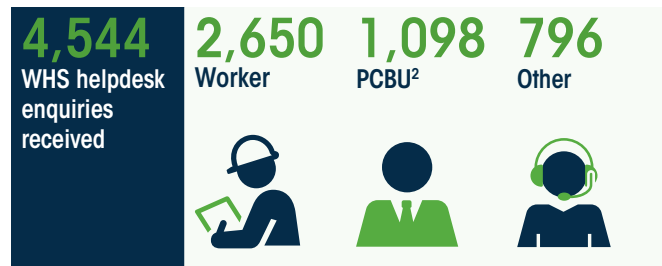
Michael Duke, Acting CEO

WHS incidents and enquiries data

WHS incidents



WHS helpdesk



Death of a person

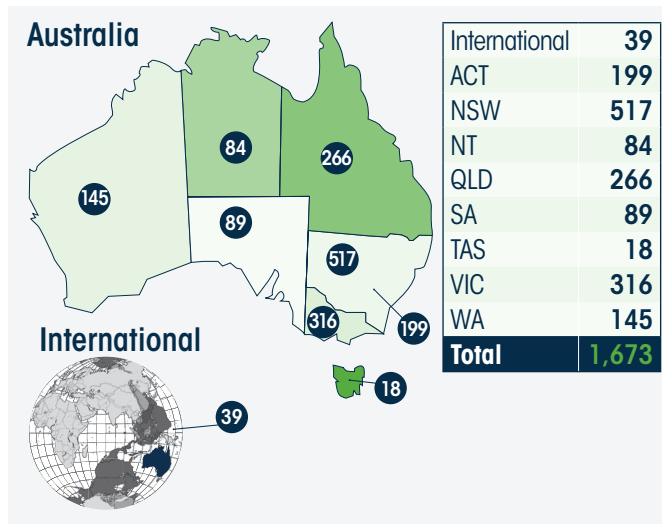


¹ Actual number of incidents reported to Comcare (each incident is counted only once, even if reported by multiple PCBUs). 'Death of a person', 'serious injury or illness' and 'dangerous incident' are terms defined under the WHS Act.

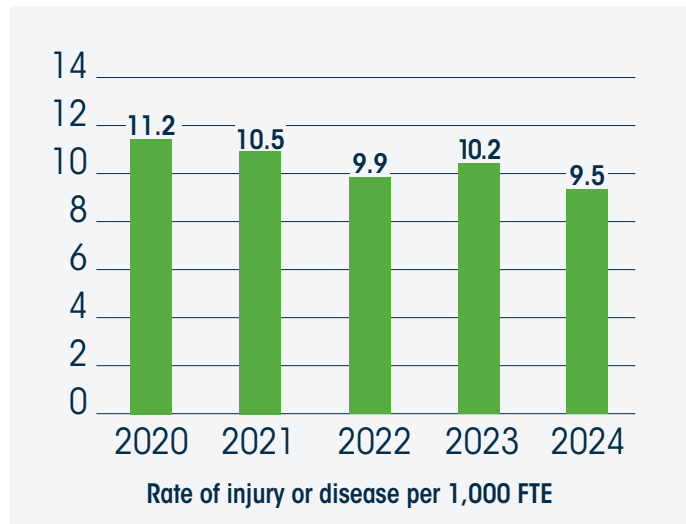
² Person conducting a business or undertaking.

Note: The number of Worker deaths and Other person death is higher than the number of Death of a person incidents because one incident can result in multiple deaths.

Notifiable incidents



Accepted workers compensation claims (SRC Act)



Inspectorate activities



243

Providing information and advice



1,033

Monitoring compliance inspections and investigations



1,276

Compliance and enforcement activities

Monitoring and compliance activities

Activities	ACT	NSW	QLD	SA/NT	VIC/TAS	WA	Other
Inspections completed ³	193	205	49	77	176	80	161
Verifications completed	5	12	8	11	20	12	21

Notices



13

Improvement notices
under s191

4

Prohibition notices
under s195

28

Non-disturbance notices
under s198

428

Notices to provide information
and/or documents
under s155

58

Power to require
production of documents
and answer questions
under s171

Approvals and authorisations

6

HSR course approvals

1,836

High-risk work licences⁵

529

High-risk notifications⁴

6,240

Plant authorisations⁶

Prosecutions under the WHS Act



5

Commenced



8

Continued



1

Concluded criminal proceedings

³ Excludes Telecommunications Asbestos Safety Compliance activities.

⁴ Includes abandoned tank notifications, carcinogen authorisations, demolition works notifications, emergency demolition works involving asbestos notifications, health monitoring reports, high respirable asbestos fibre levels notifications, lead risk work notifications, licensed asbestos removal work notifications (notifiable), manifest notifications, pipeline notifications, and silica workplace exposure standard notifications.

⁵ High-risk work licences issued by the regulator.

⁶ Plant item and design registrations approved by the regulator.



Regulatory programs

Major Infrastructure Projects

This program of work comprises the regulation of complex and high-profile construction projects across Australia that involve high-risk WHS matters.

Our regulatory approach includes conducting proactive monitoring and compliance activities and providing information and advice to stakeholders. These activities are informed by jurisdictional and industry intelligence, and risk- and evidence-based practices. Priority focus areas are silica risks, construction safety and the management of contractors.

The Major Infrastructure Projects (MIP) team engages with PCBU's, workers, HSRs, unions and WHS regulators from other jurisdictions. It seeks to ensure compliance and support stakeholders by sharing better practice WHS initiatives.

In 2024, the MIP team conducted:

- **35** reactive inspections
- **60** proactive inspections
- **64** information and advice activities.

Telecommunications Asbestos Safety Compliance

Comcare has a dedicated program regulating the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN).

Telecommunications Asbestos Safety Compliance (TASC) aims to ensure the highest levels of WHS are applied to the rollout of the NBN. The program's primary focus is ensuring effective management of the risks relating to the removal of asbestos-containing material and associated civil construction works.

TASC uses a targeted, risk-based approach to inspecting NBN rollout works. The TASC team also regularly provides guidance and information to the rollout's delivery partners and contractors to improve and support their understanding of relevant WHS requirements. In 2024, the TASC program achieved:

- **404** site visits and assessments
- **175** contractors assessed (25% were new contractors).



National Investigations and Oversight

Comcare is responding to the growing complexity of the regulatory environment and the evolving jurisdictional landscape.

Our work in this area includes:

- investigations into alleged breaches of the WHS Act
- managing, monitoring and reporting on WHS undertakings
- supporting injured workers and bereaved families
- supporting the implementation of the Australian Government Investigations Standard 2022 within Comcare.

The National Investigations and Oversight (NIO) team implements best practice methodology and quality investigation activities, techniques and capabilities.

Investigations

NIO has **9** active investigations. In its second year of operation:

- **8** investigations into alleged breaches of the WHS Act were commenced
- **5** prosecutions were commenced under the WHS Act
- **2** matters were referred to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions.

A Comcare investigation can result in a number of possible outcomes, including a referral for prosecution or alternative enforcement action.

WHS undertakings

NIO currently has one active WHS undertaking. In 2024:

- **3** applications for a WHS undertaking were considered and **one** application for a WHS undertaking was accepted.

Family liaison service

Comcare's family liaison officer (FLO) supports injured workers and bereaved families to navigate investigation and prosecution processes and access publicly available supports.

This support is independent of investigations and separate from any workers compensation processes. It provides a range of assistance including:

- general information about Comcare's investigation, prosecution and enforcement procedures
- liaison with other investigating or prosecuting agencies
- ongoing support as the primary contact for workers, families and other persons affected by an incident
- support for inspectors planning for difficult conversations.

Our Family Support team developed and published [family support guides](#) that offer practical advice for workers and families following an incident. The guides cover:

- available support including counselling, obtaining financial and legal advice, family support groups and other forums
- the roles of government agencies following a death or serious injury
- investigation and prosecution processes.



Psychosocial Regulation

A specialist stream including the delivery of the Psychosocial Inspection Program, support for complex matters, and building capability within Comcare's jurisdiction.

Comcare has a dedicated focus on psychosocial regulatory activities through the work of its Psychosocial Regulation team.

The team leads and supports Comcare's broader inspectorate to further strengthen its psychosocial regulation capability and support PCBU compliance.

Comcare appointed 5 additional inspectors to the psychosocial regulation team in 2024. During this period the team:

- finalised 12 psychosocial inspections
- provided support, subject matter expertise and case assistance to inspectors on regulatory matters as required
- developed and delivered 3 trauma-informed regulation training sessions across the inspectorate, helping ensure that Comcare inspectors have the knowledge and skills to approach interactions in line with current trauma-informed best practice
- delivered presentations to the inspectorate on systems-based regulation of psychosocial risks, and changes to psychosocial legislation.

The team supported and delivered several activities to provide information and advice to Comcare's jurisdiction and uplift capacity in the management of psychosocial risks. In 2024, activities included:

- delivering 10 presentations to PCBUs, including for the Comcare National Conference, Safe Work Month and a HSR forum
- representing Comcare at the Psychological Health Community of Practice, Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Harms Community of Practice and Health and Wellbeing Community of Practice to build capacity in psychosocial risk management and connect with key stakeholders across WHS regulators.

Psychosocial Inspection Program pilot

The purpose of the program is to promote and enable health and safety at work through proactive systems-based regulation to prevent psychological injury and illness. In 2024 the pilot was completed.

An independent evaluation found that the pilot was a success: it met its objectives to improve employer knowledge of psychosocial safety, increase commitment to psychologically safe workplaces, and support compliance with WHS obligations.

In preparation for full-scale implementation of the program in 2025, the team has implemented the evaluation's 13 recommendations. This will ensure the sustainability and long-term success of the program in the context of Comcare's strategic focus on prevention.



WHS law reform

Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work Code of Practice

On 27 October 2024, the Minister, the Hon Murray Watt, approved the Code of Practice on Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work for the Commonwealth jurisdiction. The Code prescribes how PCBU's should identify and manage psychosocial hazards that may create risks to workers' psychological and physical health and safety. The Code supports amended Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011 that came into effect on 1 April 2023.

Development of the Code, and related changes to the Regulations, implement key recommendations of the 2018 review of the model WHS laws. The Code substantially adopts the Safe Work Australia model Code of Practice of the same name, but departs where necessary to support the Regulations and to fit the nature of the Commonwealth jurisdiction. One key difference is that the Commonwealth code and regulations require PCBU's to use the hierarchy of controls when managing psychosocial hazards.

The Code came into effect on 2 November 2024 and is publicly available on the Federal Register of Legislation.

Crystalline silica regulations

On 1 July 2024, the supply, processing and manufacture of engineered stone slabs, panels and benchtops became prohibited under the Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011 in the Commonwealth jurisdiction.

The prohibition means that it is an offence under the Regulations for a PCBU to carry out, or direct or allow a worker to carry out, work involving the manufacture, supply, processing or installation of legacy engineered stone benchtops, panels and slabs, except in limited circumstances such as for:

- the purposes of genuine research and to sample and identify engineered stone
- the removal, repair and minor modification to previously installed engineered stone
- disposal of engineered stone (that is, after removal or disposal of uninstalled stock).

To support the prohibition, 2 national frameworks have been established:

- **a notification framework** under which PCBU's must notify the relevant WHS regulator if they are proposing to carry out permitted work to remove, dispose of, repair or make minor modifications to legacy engineered stone
- **an exemption framework** that provides a process for a WHS regulator to exempt a type of engineered stone from the ban where there is compelling evidence that it can be worked with safely.

On 1 September 2024, stronger regulation of all crystalline silica substances (CSS) came into effect in the Commonwealth jurisdiction. The amendments to the WHS Regulations apply to all materials containing at least 1% crystalline silica, including engineered stone.

This means that from 1 September 2024, PCBU's who process CSS at the workplace using power tools or other machinery are required to assess whether the processing is high risk, meaning it is likely to result in a risk to the health of someone at the workplace. If the processing is assessed as high risk, PCBU's must:

- develop and use a silica risk control plan
- provide crystalline silica training to workers and others at risk of exposure to silica dust
- where required, undertake air monitoring and report any exceedance of the workplace exposure standards for respirable crystalline silica to the relevant WHS regulator
- where required, provide health monitoring for workers at risk of exposure to silica dust.



Events and engagement

2024 Comcare National Conference

The 2024 Comcare National Conference was held on 20–21 August in Canberra, bringing together over 900 delegates from across Australia to focus on ‘Collaboration for prevention and change’ in an ever-changing environment. Delegates enjoyed networking opportunities including a welcome reception, conference dinner and a dedicated session for HSRs.

Delegates heard from captivating speakers including journalist and author Stan Grant, former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins AO, interviewer and TV presenter Kirk Docker, Safe Work Australia CEO Marie Boland, Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman, disability advocate Dr Dinesh Palipana, and many more. Discussions covered regulation, early intervention, return to work, leadership and collaboration, and the prevention of workplace injuries and illnesses. For updates on the 2026 Comcare National Conference, subscribe to [Comcare e-news](#).⁷

Comcare alternates between holding the conference and [National Work Health and Safety Awards](#)⁸ each year. In November 2025, we are celebrating 20 years of the Awards with a gala dinner in Canberra. Nominations are open from 3 March to 30 April 2025.



Image: Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman and disability advocate Dr Dinesh Palipana.

⁷ comcare.gov.au/subscribe

⁸ comcare.gov.au/whs-awards

HSR engagement

[HSRs](#)⁹ play a critical role in representing workers and helping to identify and support the resolution of health and safety issues.

It is estimated there are at least 4,000 HSRs within Comcare's WHS jurisdiction. In 2024, Comcare continued to focus on increasing engagement opportunities with HSRs. This included:

- completing the HSR Working Group action plan for capability building, communications and engagement with HSRs
- continuing to grow the Comcare HSR network, which increased from 901 to 1,936 subscribers over 2024
- sending a regular HSR Network Highlights newsletter to raise awareness of Comcare's activities and guidance
- launching a HSR eLearn
- revising the HSR Handbook
- co-designing and delivering a HSR Forum on 23 October 2024.

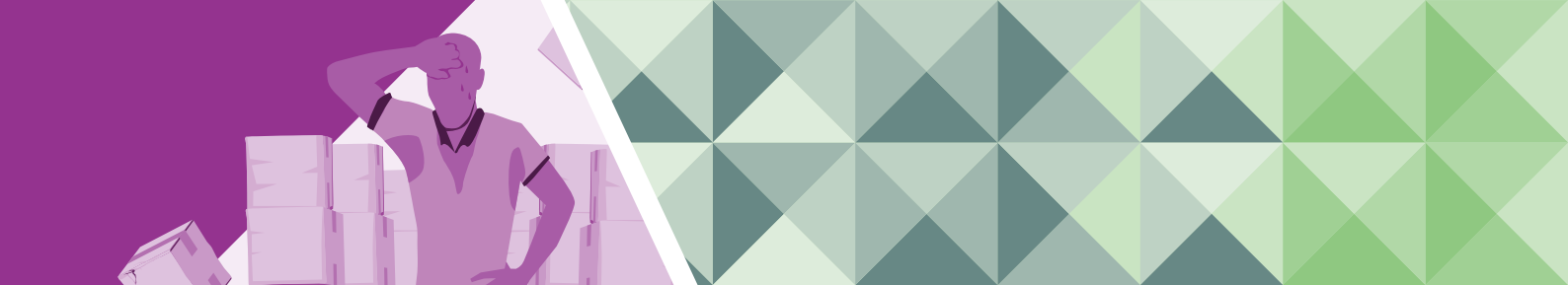
Webinars and forums

Comcare hosted a range of [webinars and forums](#)¹⁰ throughout 2024, attracting positive feedback and high satisfaction ratings.

Online event		Satisfaction rating
	Contractor management and regulatory process enhancements webinar – 28 February 2024	85%
	Psychosocial Health and Safety Forum – 15 May 2024	87%
	Transport Network Forum – 26 June 2024	93%
	2024–25 Regulatory Priorities and WHS Consultation, Cooperation and Coordination webinar – 3 July 2024	89%
	Psychosocial Health and Safety Forum – 10 October 2024	97%
	Health and Safety Representatives (HSR) Forum – 23 October 2024	93%
	Transport Network Forum – 30 October 2024	91%
In-person event		Satisfaction rating
	Mental Health Community of Practice – 4 and 18 June 2024 Steps to implement the People at Work psychosocial risk assessment tool in workplaces including survey setup, interpreting results and reviewing progress; case study workshop; discussion and questions answered	95%

⁹ comcare.gov.au/roles/hsrs

¹⁰ comcare.gov.au/about/news-events/events/comcare-webinars



Guidance and resources

Comcare provides guidance and resources to help employers and workers maintain healthy and safe workplaces.

Most viewed WHS content on the Comcare website (total unique views)

- Physical hazards **(25,100)**
- WHS laws are changing **(24,949)**
- Biological hazards **(24,379)**
- Psychosocial hazards **(21,064)**
- Health and safety representatives **(20,039)**

Live and self-paced learning

Through our learning management system, [Comcare LMS](#)¹¹, we offer live (in-person and virtual) workshops and presentations, as well as self-paced learning. There are offerings for PCBUs, managers, supervisors and workers, as well as topic-based content. In 2024, the overall satisfaction rate was 90%. In 2025, new eLearn offerings include content on body stressing, work trials and bullying. For 2025 workshop dates, see our [training calendar](#).¹² For enquiries, email education@comcare.gov.au.

Training delivered	Top 3 WHS self-paced courses	Top 3 eLearns
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Live learning (workshops and presentations) (2,614)Online self-paced (eLearns) (15,285)Other education products (421 videos and 939 resources)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Workplace rehabilitation providerPsychosocial risk managementManagers – workplace sexual harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">WHS for workersIntroduction to psychological health and safety in the workplaceWorkplace sexual harassment: an overview for workers

¹¹ learning.comcare.gov.au
¹² comcare.gov.au/about/training

Regulatory priorities

Comcare identified 6 regulatory priorities to deliver on through proactive programs of work in 2023–2024. These remain our focus in 2024–2025.

	WHS management systems		Psychosocial hazards
	Silica		Body stressing – hazardous manual tasks
	Contractor management		Being hit by moving objects

These [regulatory priorities](#)¹³ were determined using a risk-based and evidence-led approach, which included reviewing and analysing our regulatory data, and focusing on the priorities in [Comcare's Prevention Strategy 2022–2025](#)¹⁴ and Safe Work Australia's [Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2023–2033](#).¹⁵ Continuing these priorities into the 2024–2025 financial year enables us to build on the important work that has already been done.

In 2024, we continued to scope and deliver activities to address the identified priorities, including a proactive WHS management systems inspection program. This program aims to support PCBUs to meet their duties and obligations under the WHS Act. Well-implemented, effective WHS management systems provide a framework for improving an organisation's WHS performance, and can have a large-scale positive impact on the health and safety of workers.

In June 2024, we completed the first year of proactive WHS management systems inspections, which in 2023–2024 focused on incident management systems. We conducted 200 inspections, working collaboratively with PCBUs across the jurisdiction to identify issues for resolution and opportunities for improvement. In July 2024, our inspectors began the second year of WHS management systems inspections, assessing whether organisations in our jurisdiction have systems in place to enable effective WHS consultation, cooperation and coordination. Inspectors are engaging with management, employees, HSRs and contractors throughout the inspection.

The prevention of harms associated with psychosocial hazards remains a focus for all WHS regulators. In 2024, this priority was addressed through the implementation of a pilot Psychosocial Inspection Program, delivery of Psychosocial Health and Safety forums, and information and advice provided to PCBUs on request.

Contract management arrangements are a persistent WHS challenge, and our WHS incident data continues to show a high number of notifications involve contractors. In February 2024, we delivered a [Contractor Management and Regulatory Process Enhancements](#)¹⁶ webinar, where we discussed relevant WHS duties and case law, and outlined the elements of an effective contractor management system. We developed a tool for inspectors to ensure compliance assessments of contractor management arrangements are undertaken consistently across the jurisdiction in response to notified incidents involving contractors.

Work continues on these priorities into 2025.

¹³ comcare.gov.au/scheme-legislation/whs-act/reg-priorities

¹⁴ comcare.gov.au/about/forms-pubs/docs/pubs/corporate-publications/Comcare-Prevention-Strategy-2022-2025.pdf

¹⁵ www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/awhs-strategy_23-33#:~:text=The%20purpose%20of%20the%20Australian,delaying%20on%20key%20WHS%20improvements

¹⁶ youtube.com/watch?v=nXiCP-Ab-xo



Contact us

Book WHS training: comcare.gov.au/training

WHS Helpdesk:



WHS.Help@comcare.gov.au



1300 366 979 (Monday – Friday, 8.30 am – 5 pm AEST)



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