Industry Study – Occupational Health & Safety

OHS principles & requirements

The term ‘occupational health and safety’ is used to cover a range of workplace practices that, together with federal and state laws aim to improve the standards of workplace safety and the health of employees. The general idea is to reduce work related injuries and deaths. People working in the Timber Products and Furniture Technologies industries must be familiar with the OH&S requirements that affect them in the workplace.

OH&S doesn’t just provide guidelines for the employers. The employees must also make sure that they follow the guidelines. If an employee has a serious accident where they cannot work for the rest of their lives and they have been found to be negligent in their duties regarding OH&S then they will not receive any compensation.

Risk assessment and risk management are the two most basic principles of OHS.

Signage

OHS Signage falls into a number of categories. These are sorted according to the message they are conveying and use a range of colours, images and text to provide advice.

The example below shows the typical colours, images and text used for different types of safety signage

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
Personal protective equipment (PPE) refers to the equipment worn by workers to reduce their exposure to hazards. PPE includes such items as:

- eye protection (goggles, glasses, faceshields)
- hearing protection (ear plugs, ear muffs)
- respiratory protection (filter respirators, air-line respirators, SCBA)
- foot protection (safety shoes and boots, spats, rubber gum boots)
- head protection (hard hats, fire-fighters helmets, cricketers helmets, broad brimmed hats)
- body protection (aprons, overalls, gloves, high visibility clothing)
- any substance used to protect health, for example, sunscreen.

Safe Working Practices
Safe Working Practices ensure that employers and employees are being responsible in the workplace that they are operating in. The practices may include administering first aid, using the correct materials handling procedures, carrying out risk assessments and should generally be prefaced with some form of workplace or formal training.

First Aid
First Aid training is a very important and significant credential to have. Some businesses may insist that their employees have a First Aid certificate so that if they have an accident or are on the scene of an accident they can offer help that may save someone's life.

All businesses have to have a First Aid kit on hand. It is usually a wall mounted cabinet or case that can be kept in a cupboard. The location of the First Aid kit is shown with a large green and white cross. Each kit needs to contain a minimum amount of equipment and they are supposed to be checked on a regular basis to make sure they are properly stocked.

Materials Handling
Whenever new materials are delivered they should be accompanied by Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS). This tells us what problems the materials can cause and how we should handle the materials to avoid any safety issues. This information is particularly important for handling chemicals.

Manual handling of materials involves the physical activity required to move an object.

In 1990, Worksafe Australia introduced a National Standard for Manual Handling and a National Code of Practice for Manual Handling. These aim at preventing injuries to workers by educating them in the correct ways to perform operations such as lifting.

Government Legislation
On a federal level Safe Work Australia is made up of a number of state, industry and union representatives. Safe Work Australia (SWA) works on issues at a national level in an effort to:

- Develop policies, Acts and Codes of Practice appropriate to OHS
- prevent workplace death, injury and disease
- improve workers' compensation arrangements, and
- improve the rehabilitation and return to work of injured workers.

Each state and territory is responsible for enforcing the laws, acts and regulations. In NSW this body is known as Workcover.

SWA tries to build co-operation between the government, businesses and unions. This is done to develop solutions and make decisions about policies. From here the states develop their own legislation and policies. NSW developed its Occupational Health & Safety Act in 1983. The most recent changes to this Act were made in the year 2000. This has again been changed to the national Work Health & Safety Act (2011) that became active on the 1st of January, 2012.

OH&S legislation was introduced in NSW in 1983 for a number of reasons, including:

- The increasing cost of workers compensation,
- Many workers were not being covered,

- Overseas and national legal developments,
- There was too much OH&S legislation as there were up to 26 different Acts,
- Self-regulation was not working.

The Work Health & Safety Act 2011 is the legislation developed by government. From this Act, the Work Health & Safety Regulation 2011 was developed. This document describes to employers and employees how they can meet the requirements of the Act. 'Codes of Practice' are then developed to help employers and employees meet the requirements of the Act and the Regulation. Codes of Practice are not law, however they should be followed to ensure that the requirements are being met.

The Federal Work Health and Safety Act 2011

In Australia money amounting in the billions of dollars is lost every year due to accidents and illness in the workforce. Both the Commonwealth and State Governments have legislation in place that aims to prevent accidents and monitor danger in the workplace.

In New South Wales two main laws covering prevention, rehabilitation and compensation for workplace injury are:

1. Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000
2. Workers Compensation Act 1987

In NSW, Work Health and Safety law is administered by WorkCover NSW. It also monitors the occupational health, safety, rehabilitation and workers compensation schemes in NSW.

The Work Health and Safety Act 2011 aims to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all people at work, including visitors. The provisions of the Act extend to all places of work throughout Australia and covers all employers.

The objectives of the Act are to:

1. Provide for a balanced and nationally consistent framework to secure the health and safety of workers and workplaces by:
   (a) protecting workers and other persons against harm to their health, safety and welfare through the elimination or minimisation of risks arising from work; and

(b) providing for fair and effective workplace representation, consultation, co-operation and issue resolution in relation to work health and safety; and

(c) encouraging unions and employer organisations to take a constructive role in promoting improvements in work health and safety practices, and assisting persons conducting businesses or undertakings and workers to achieve a healthier and safer working environment; and

(d) promoting the provision of advice, information, education and training in relation to work health and safety; and

(e) securing compliance with this Act through effective and appropriate compliance and enforcement measures; and

(f) ensuring appropriate scrutiny and review of actions taken by persons exercising powers and performing functions under this Act; and

(g) providing a framework for continuous improvement and progressively higher standards of work health and safety; and

(h) maintaining and strengthening the national harmonisation of laws relating to work health and safety and to facilitate a consistent national approach to work health and safety in this jurisdiction.

Work Health and Safety Committees

The Act states that occupational health and safety committees must be established: in a workplace of 5 or more employees; where the majority of employees request it.

An occupational health and safety committee is a forum where WHS problems can be identified and resolved, and where safe systems and procedures can be developed and monitored.

Committees can:

- review measures taken to make the workplace healthy and safe
- bring to the attention of the employer and investigate any situation which a committee member or an employee thinks is unsafe
- resolve any health and safety problem, if possible. If the committee can not resolve the problem it can ask an inspector from WorkCover NSW to help
- help to develop a system to record accidents and hazardous situation in the workplace

- help to develop a safe working environment and safe systems of work
- help to develop a health and safety policy for the workplace
- monitor procedures for ensuring the proper use and proper maintenance of protective equipment
- monitor procedures for ensuring the replacement of protective equipment when this is needed
- recommend to the employer ways to protect the health and safety of people at the workplace

Committee members can:

- inspect the workplace in a way determined by the committee:
    - routinely, at intervals agreed to by the employer, but not less than once every three months
    - or whenever an accident or possible hazardous situation occurs and not fixing the problem could cause injury in the immediate future
    - or at any time with the approval of the employer.
- obtain details of proposed changes to the workplace that could affect health and safety
- have access to all information kept by the employer on accidents and occupational disease in the workplace
- have access to all information kept by the employer about the risks to health and safety of any equipment or substance
- recommend to the employer training and education for particular groups within the workplace
- inform the convenor of the committee of any breach of occupational health and safety law
- issue a Provisional Improvement Notice

An employer cannot dismiss an employee, or alter their position to their detriment, because they make a complaint about a matter which they consider injurious to their health. Similarly, an employer cannot dismiss an employee simply because they are a member of an occupational health and safety committee, or exercise the functions of a committee member.

Responsibilities of employers

Employers are obliged to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees. Things employers must do to ensure this include:

- provide or maintain equipment and systems of work that are safe and without risks to health
- make arrangements for ensuring the safe use, handling, storage and transport of equipment and substances
- provide the information, instruction, training and supervision necessary to ensure the health and safety of employees
- maintain places of work under their control in safe condition and providing and maintaining safe entrances and exits
- make available adequate information about research and relevant tests of substances used at the place of work.

Employers must not require employees to pay for anything done or provided to meet specific requirements made under the Act or associated legislation. Manufacturers and suppliers of plant and substances to workplaces must make sure that they are safe to use when properly used. They must:

- carry out necessary research, testing and examinations
- make available adequate information about research and relevant tests of substances they manufacture, transfer or supply
- make available adequate information about conditions for the safe use of equipment and substances they manufacture, transfer or supply.

Persons who erect or install equipment at a workplace must make sure that it is safe to use when properly used.

Persons in control of non-domestic premises used as a place of work must ensure that the premises exits and entrances are in a safe condition.

Employees must take reasonable care of the health and safety of others. Employees must cooperate with employers in their efforts to comply with occupational health and safety requirements.

No person must:

- interfere with or misuse things provided for the health, safety or welfare of persons at work
- obstruct attempts to give aid or attempts to prevent a serious risk to the heath and safety of a person at work

- refuse a reasonable request to assist in giving aid or preventing a risk to health and safety.

Requirements Regarding the Rehabilitation of Injured Workers
Every employer must have a general rehabilitation program, which states the organisation's policies, commitments and procedures for the rehabilitation of its injured workers. The program should be designed to maintain each company's productivity while assisting injured workers to recover and return safely to work as soon as possible. If injured workers do not return to work, the employer may sustain higher compensation costs.

Sometimes workers need help to return to work after injury or illness. They may benefit from a rehabilitation plan that includes things like an assessment of their job, a gradual increase in hours or duties and advice about the injury so that it doesn't happen again.

Rehabilitation plans can be arranged by the employer or by an accredited rehabilitation provider.

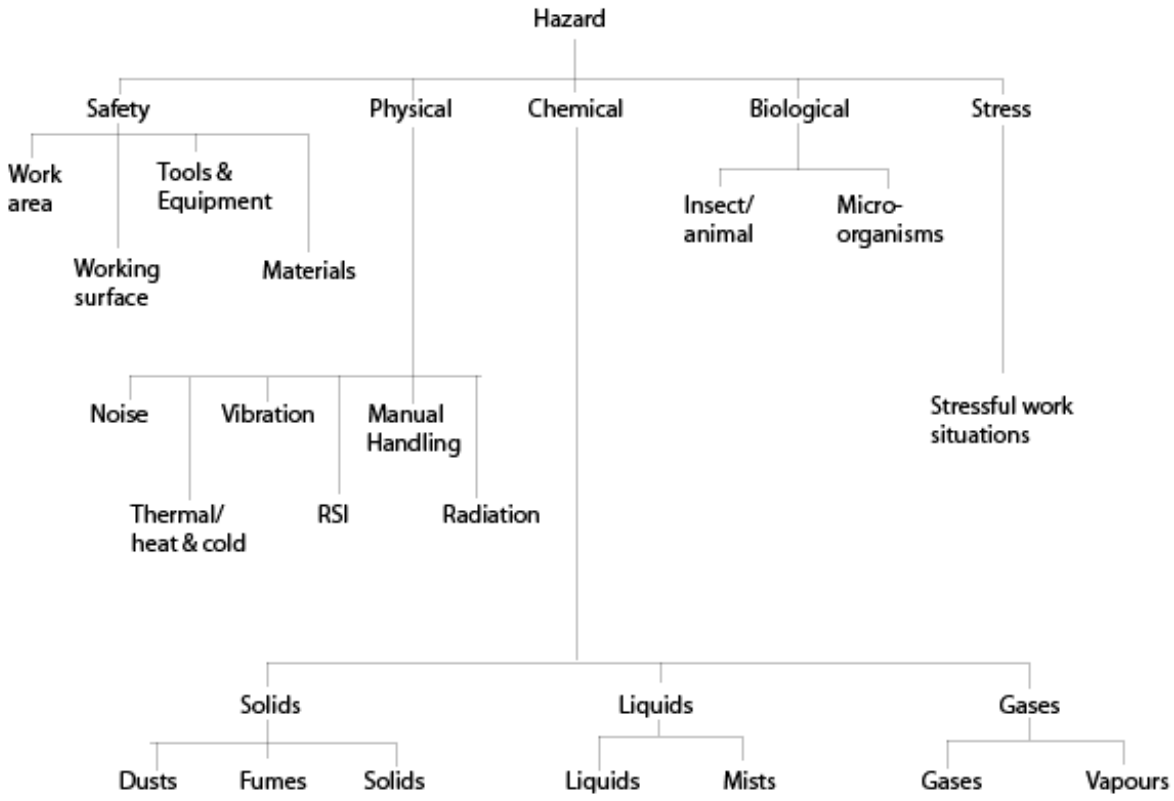
Industry Requirements: Standards; Policing; Prosecution
Industry standards are governed by the Acts and Regulations set by government legislation. In this case the Work Health & Safety Act 2011 and the Work Health & Safety Regulation 2011.

In NSW, Workcover is the government body responsible for the ensuring these Acts and Regulations are being followed by businesses. Workcover can prosecute businesses and/or individuals they find are in breaching the requirements.

Hazards

A hazard is a potential source of harm. This may include a person being exposed to a dangerous or harmful situation, physical or otherwise, that may affect the health and safety of that person.

Hazards can be broken down into groups and types. These groups and types can be seen in the following diagram.



Noise is a hazard that is rarely thought about. The table below provides examples of sounds, how they affect the hearing and the decibel rating. The scale is exponential, meaning that 90 dB(A) is about 10 times louder than 80 dB(A). This is a rough guide and how close you are to the noise makes a big difference. It has been found that a level of 85 – 90 dB(A) can cause hearing problems and hearing protection should be worn.

Effect on Hearing	**Sound Level in dB(A)**	**Example of Sound**
Very dangerous	140	Jet engine
	130	Rivet hammer
	Pain level	
	120	Aircraft propeller
	110	Masonry drill
	100	2 stroke chainsaw
Can cause permanent Damage. Wear PPE	90	Heavy truck
	80	Heavy traffic
	70	Family car
	60	Normal conversation
	50	Quiet conversation
	40	Background radio
	30	Whispering
	20	Quiet room
	10	Rustling leaves
	0	Silence

Safety Training & Human Factors

It is an OH&S requirement that all staff receive safety training on a regular basis. Within the Building and Construction industry this takes place as formal 'Toolbox Talks'. Within smaller businesses operating in the TP&FI safety training may be done in house, by attending TAFE courses or other recognised courses. These safety training sessions should always be well documented. The documentation includes the points raised, topics spoken about, who delivered the talk or presentation, who was present and those people's signatures.

Workplace Culture

The workplace culture is the atmosphere of the work environment. This can include the type of environment that people work in, the way people interact with one another in the workplace, the ways staff go about their work, and the practices undertaken in the workplace environment. It is important that an organisation is seen by it's employees to value safety and foster a friendly and professional feeling within the business.

OHS Communication

It is very important that OHS issues relevant to the Timber Products & Furniture Technologies industries is communicated to the people that are affected by it. These include the employers, employees and site visitors. Information can be communicated both formally and informally by a variety of means, such as: Tool Box Talks, brochures, internet sites, formal meetings, signage, MSDS, newsletters, noticeboards and other methods.

Communication may be in different languages to suit the workplace, it may be visual or auditory.

Review Questions – Industry Study – Occupational Health and Safety

1. What reasons led to the introduction of the 1983 OH&S Act and it's revision in 1987?

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2. Think of why these reasons led to the introduction of the 1983 OH&S Act and it's revision in 1987. Provide points for each reason.

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3. Try to find at least two examples of each of the types of hazards in this school.

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4. Where is the First Aid cabinet located in this workshop?

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5. How do you think that your safety training could be improved at school?

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6. What is the correct way to lift an object from the ground so that you can put it on a bench?

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7. What is your understanding of workplace culture?

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8. What important document must accompany any materials when they are purchased? What does this document tell us?

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9.Describe the features of the following types of signs:

- Mandatory Signs:

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- Prohibition Signs:

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- Warning Signs:

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