

# ohsrm Guidelines

Occupational health and safety risk management

## Introduction

A key requirement of the NSW Occupational Health and Safety legislation is to systematically manage the risks arising from workplace hazards<sup>#</sup>. There must also be effective consultation and communication with the workers involved about these risks and how they are to be managed.

The ohsrm Guidelines and support systems have been developed to assist the University to achieve compliance with the legislation. A Working Party of the Central OHS Committee was involved in the development of the OHS risk management system and the University community was consulted prior to its finalisation and implementation in 2002.

These Guidelines have particular relevance for Managers, Supervisors and staff members who have responsibility for overseeing the activities of other staff or students. University staff with supervisory authority are required to ensure that these Guidelines are effectively implemented in their designated areas of responsibility.

## ohsrm Steps

The following steps are used to manage occupational health and safety risks.

- Step 1. Identify hazards<sup>#</sup> and hazardous jobs
- Step 2. Assign priority for each hazard<sup>#</sup> and hazardous job
- Step 3. Assess the risk to find out exactly what makes it hazardous. Work through the hazards<sup>#</sup> and hazardous jobs in order of priority.
- Step 4. Control the risk(s) or fix the problem(s).
- Step 5. Evaluate periodically to check that OHS risks are being effectively managed.

### Step 1. Identify hazards<sup>#</sup> and hazardous jobs

There must be an active process for identifying hazards<sup>#</sup> in the workplace and hazardous jobs undertaken by staff and students. A hazard register should be maintained for the work area and updated at least once per year. The ohsrm PART A form is provided as a standard hazard register to aide this record keeping.

<sup>#</sup> The term "Hazard" should be interpreted as anything that may jeopardise the health, safety or welfare of staff, students or visitors. In an office environment, hazards may typically include manual handling (of office equipment), overuse injury (from mouse and keyboard use), work related stress, noise, glare, trip hazards etc.

Hazards and hazardous jobs can be identified by:

- Reviewing incident reports and records to find out what has gone wrong in the past and could be problematic in future.
- Observing work activities to see whether safety precautions are in place and being used correctly, or whether the people involved are at risk of injury.
- Asking staff and students to raise OHS matters during regular discussions eg., during workgroup meetings (formal or informal). This might include discussion of recent incidents, maintenance issues, suggested improvements etc.
- Reviewing standard operating procedures to ensure that safety aspects have been satisfactorily addressed.

- Referring to labels, instructions and literature that relates to a particular workplace or activity. These may contain information about particular hazards and how the associated risks can best be managed. Typical literature includes operator manuals, safety data sheets, industry bulletins, journals etc.
- Observe indicators such as high absentee rates, low morale, conflict between employees, ill-health, fatigue, and poor work quality. These may signify that work demands are beyond the capacity of the workgroup.

Typical hazards or hazardous jobs include:

- Keyboard work for long periods without a break.
- Activities that involve lifting or carrying materials or equipment.
- Trip hazards like trailing cords, frayed carpet or boxes in walkways.
- Using a hazardous substance for cleaning or in a laboratory process.
- Noise generated by machinery or during loud events.
- Solar heat and UV radiation when working outdoors.
- Working with micro-organisms that may cause infection.
- Working with sources of ionising radiation.
- Working with animals that could bite, kick, crush, or transmit disease.
- Dealing with clients or other people who are potentially violent.
- Working with sharp instruments eg., needles and blades.
- Working with or close to machinery with moving parts.
- Driving long distances to or from fieldwork.

## Step 2. Assign priority for each hazard<sup>#</sup> or hazardous job

For each hazard<sup>#</sup> and hazardous job listed in Step 1, assign a priority rating and record this beside the hazard description on the ohsrm PART A form.

Any given workplace may have a considerable number of OHS risks to be managed. Therefore, highest priority is assigned to the risks that have the greatest potential for loss or injury. There are two aspects to be considered when prioritising the risks:

- the likelihood of exposure ie., how many people are exposed, how often, and;
- the potential consequences of exposure to the hazard ie., whether serious injury may result.

Found a hazard? Think about: How likely is it to hurt someone? ▼	How severely could it hurt someone? ▼		
	!!! kill or disable	!! several days off work	! first aid
<b>very likely ++</b> could happen regularly	1	2	3
<b>likely +</b> could happen occasionally	2	3	4
<b>unlikely -</b> <i>could</i> happen, but only rarely	3	4	5
<b>very unlikely --</b> <i>could</i> happen, but probably never will	4	5	6

The numbers show how important it is to do something:

**1 do something immediately**

6 do something when possible.

WorkCover's "HazPak" frequency and severity matrix shown above is used to assign a "rating" to a risk. Those risks where exposure is more likely and the potential consequences more severe are given highest priority for prompt resolution.

When considering the likelihood or consequences of exposure, bear in mind the existing risk control measures eg., the safe operating equipment and procedures that are in place etc. The existence of suitable risk control measures will reduce the potential for injury.

Physical hazards associated with University buildings and grounds should be referred to the Campus Infrastructure Services "Service Desk" for resolution: x17838, <http://www.facilities.usyd.edu.au/>

### Step 3. Assess the risk

Select the highest priority hazard<sup>#</sup> or hazardous job recorded on the ohsrm PART A form and assess the risk.

A risk assessment is required to find out what makes the job hazardous. When assessing the risk, it is essential to **consult** with those directly involved in doing the hazardous work to obtain first hand information about hazard exposures and potential problems.

Record the risk assessment results for each hazard<sup>#</sup> and hazardous job, including the names of those consulted, on an ohsrm PART B form.

The risk assessment should consider each of the following risk factors:

- **The physical activity required** for the task eg., if it involves physical exertion, repetitive action, uncomfortable posture etc.
- **The work environment** ie., lighting, layout, temperature, egress routes, isolation, traffic etc.
- **The nature of the hazard itself** eg., hazardous substances, machinery, sharps/blades, radiation, potentially violent clients or intruders etc.
- **The individuals involved** in the process ie., their level of training and expertise, their physical capacity to perform the task, their health status ie., any existing condition that may increase the risk eg., injury, age, pregnancy, allergy etc.

The risk assessment may find that one or more of these risk factors are present.

### Step 4. Control the risks

Establish suitable risk control measures for the highest priority risks. The information obtained during Step 3, the risk assessment, will dictate the risk control measures that should be adopted. For example, if the assessment finds that poor lighting in the area is a risk factor, then the lighting should be improved.

When considering risk control options, it is essential that supervisors and managers **consult** with those people directly involved in the process. These experienced people typically have good, practical ideas about suitable risk control measures. Gaining their ownership and commitment to the chosen risk controls is also essential to attaining acceptance for the use of the control measures.

The following range of risk control measures should be considered. Known as the "hierarchy of hazard control", these are listed in priority order ie., the most effective is listed first, with less effective options listed lower. The highest practical levels of risk control should be chosen. A combination of higher and lower level risk controls is usually desirable.

Record on the ohsrm PART B form what risk control measures will be implemented, who is responsible, and the due-by date for implementation. Also record the names of those consulted when deciding on the risk controls.

## Hierarchy of hazard control

1. **Eliminate** the hazard or task if the risks outweigh the potential benefits.
2. **Substitute** the hazard with something less hazardous eg., substitute a toxic substance with another that is non-toxic.
3. **Isolate** the hazard by using barriers or distance eg., put insulation around noisy equipment.
4. Use **engineering** controls, such as local exhaust ventilation to remove dust/fumes, or automate the process.
5. **Minimise** the size or volume of the hazard and the duration of exposure to the hazard.
6. **Rearrange** the work area and work flow eg., have deliveries made to the end-point to avoid re-handling, intersperse repetitive activity with different tasks to avoid overuse injuries etc.
7. Establish **safe work practices**, such as restricting access to the area, keeping the area free of clutter, being prepared for emergencies e.g., spills, and prepare and use safe work method statements for hazardous tasks.
8. Provide **training and supervision** appropriate to the level of expertise of the personnel involved. As a minimum, this would include familiarisation with local hazards and their control, safe work methods and emergency procedures.
9. Wear **personal protective equipment** (PPE) such as robust footwear, gloves, laboratory coats, safety glasses, ear plugs/muffs, dust masks etc., as a secondary measure to supplement the other agreed risk controls.

The chosen risk control measures should be implemented as soon as possible. Any tasks that involve obvious risks that may lead to serious injury should be halted until suitable controls are put in place to reduce the risk. Sometimes the most ideal risk control options may be prohibitively expensive and need to be planned for in the longer term eg., in next years budget. In these cases, short term and medium term risk control measures (implemented within one week and 3 months respectively) should be established for the interim period.

The person responsible for implementing the risk control measures should inform those who were consulted during the decision making process about any subsequent changes to plans and progress towards completion.

Repeat Step 3 for each of the other listed hazards or hazardous jobs in priority order.

Repeat Step 4 and control the risks for each of the hazards or hazardous jobs assessed.

## Step 5. Evaluate your OHS risk management

Evaluate the management of each OHS risk periodically to ensure that the risk control measures continue to be relevant and effective. Record the results of evaluation on the ohsrm PART C form. (One PART C form can be used to record the results of several reviews of the same hazard over time, or reviews of different hazards and hazardous jobs).

The management of OHS risks is to be evaluated whenever there is a significant change in the work process such as new equipment, or new staff, or when new information about the hazard or process becomes available. As a minimum, an evaluation should be done every 3 years if the work is still performed.

If the evaluation finds that the risk controls are not in place or not effective, return to Step 3 and re-assess the risk. Even if the risk controls are still operating effectively, record the evidence of this.

## Management meetings

OHS risk management is considered to be an important part of everyday business and planning. ohsrm is therefore to be included as a standing item on the agenda of meetings dealing with the management of academic or administrative Units. If regular management meetings are not held, then regular workgroup meetings to deal specifically with OHS risk management issues may be appropriate. An ohsrm Meeting guide has been developed to assist managers and supervisors to address and continually improve their OHS risk management.

Typical ohsrm issues addressed at meetings will include:

- Review of workplace incidents and injuries that have occurred since the last meeting. An emphasis will be placed on preventing any recurrence, using the ohsrm steps as guidance.
- Consideration of OHS issues raised by workers and consulting with the staff concerned to determine an appropriate management plan for these. ohsrm forms (PARTS A, B & C) can be used to document this.
- Organising suitable OHS training, particularly for new staff eg., orientation to local risks and their management strategies, emergency procedures or specialist training eg., laboratory safety etc.
- Setting priorities for hazards to be addressed and allocating responsibility and resources for these where necessary.
- Establishing an ohsrm "Action Plan" and monitoring progress against commitments made over time.
- Monitoring ohsrm within different work units via reports from Unit managers/supervisors.
- Reviewing OHS aspects of proposed purchases by and projects to be undertaken within the Unit.
- Considering specialist OHS advice or assessment, eg., from relevant consultants, where needed.

The meeting minutes or notes will provide a good record of local OHS risk management.

The senior managers of large, higher risk areas may also consider introducing a Unit based OHS Management Committee as a mechanism to focus attention and achieve action on OHS locally. This model is used in numerous Schools, Faculties and larger administrative Units. The Head of Department is a member of the Committee and retains overall responsibility for ohsrm in the Unit. The Committee reports its activities to the Department's management committee/body. Further details about this model can be obtained from OHS & Injury Management.

## Workgroups

A workgroup is defined as a group of staff working in common under the direction of a manager or supervisor. In the University context, a workgroup may equate with a project work team, smaller Department etc. A workgroup need not be of any particular size, however the size of the workgroup must be such that regular and meaningful consultation can be undertaken. In determining the composition of workgroups, consideration should be given to the type of work performed and geographical location of individuals.

It is the responsibility of each supervisor or manager to consult with his or her workgroup members in order to identify hazards<sup>#</sup> in the work environment or hazardous aspects of work activities and effectively manage the associated OHS risks.

Consultation on OHS issues within each workgroup is intrinsic to OHS risk management. All members of a workgroup should therefore have the opportunity to participate in identifying hazards<sup>#</sup> in their own workplace, assessing the risks associated with these and contributing to the process of deciding which risk control measures should be adopted and when.

Each member of staff must be recognised as belonging to a workgroup. All workgroup members will be routinely consulted on OHS issues relevant to the workgroup by the workgroup supervisor or manager.

## **Action Plans**

Managers and supervisors are required to prepare an ohsrm "Action Plan" for their Department or workgroup. The Action Plan sets the goals for continual improvement in OHS risk management and should be documented using the Action Plan template (or equivalent) which provides prompts for local risk management action required. Action Plans should be retained with other ohsrm Program documentation for local reference and OHS auditing purposes.

## **Auditing**

An OHS auditing program has been established to monitor and report on compliance with these Guidelines in all academic and administrative units. Documentation of the ohsrm steps and Action Plans (using the ohsrm forms) will be checked, along with the minutes/notes of management meetings. Particular attention will be paid to evidence of consultation with staff and timely implementation of effective risk control measures.

## **References**

*NSW Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000*

*NSW Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001*

*HazPak - Making your workplace safer: A practical guide to basic risk assessment.* NSW WorkCover Authority.

*ohsrm Program documents on-line at: [http://www.usyd.edu.au/ohs/ohs\\_manual/ohsrm.shtml](http://www.usyd.edu.au/ohs/ohs_manual/ohsrm.shtml)*

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