



## Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

### **Occupational health and safety auditing**

In order to understand the safety requirements for occupational health and safety (OHS) auditing, and your obligations for safety, you must consider and understand relevant legislation and codes of practice.

#### What law applies

Legal obligations, legislation, codes of practice, guides

#### About occupational health and safety auditing

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Meeting legislative requirements, ensuring compliance

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## What law applies

In order to understand safety requirements and your obligations for safety, you must consider and understand relevant legislation and codes of practice.

### ***General health and safety obligations***

To understand your obligations and safety requirements you must be familiar with the:

- *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* which imposes obligations on people at workplaces to ensure workplace health and safety.

The *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* also helps you to meet your workplace health and safety obligations through the:

- *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 1997* which describes what must be done to prevent or control certain hazards which cause injury, illness or death
- codes of practice (or prior to 18 November 2004, advisory standards) which are designed to give practical advice about ways to manage exposure to risks common to industry.

Every Queensland employer must have **workers' compensation** insurance. Most employers insure with WorkCover Queensland, while a small number of large organisations have their own insurance. This insurance coverage ensures that employees injured at work receive financial support.

### ***What you must do***

If the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 1997* describes how to prevent or minimise a risk at your workplace you **must** do what the regulation says.

If there is a code of practice (or prior to 18 November 2004, an advisory standard) that describes how to prevent or minimise a risk at your workplace you **must** do what the code says or adopt and follow another way that gives the same level of protection against the risk.

If there is no regulation or code of practice about a risk at your workplace you **must** choose an appropriate way to manage exposure to the risk. People must, where there is no regulation or code of practice about a risk, take reasonable precautions and exercise proper diligence against the risk.

See the *Risk Management Advisory Standard 2000* (now known as a Code of Practice) for further information.

## **About occupational health and safety auditing**

Occupational health and safety (OHS) auditing is a term used to describe a wide range of assessments that can be undertaken for a variety of different purposes.

An OHS management system is a planned, documented and verifiable method of managing OHS hazards. What makes it a system is the deliberate linking and flow of processes that creates an intentional way of managing OHS matters.

Audits are conducted to determine the effectiveness of management systems and to identify the strengths and opportunities for improvements.

## Compliance auditing

An audit can be specific and undertaken to determine if workplace practices are meeting legislative requirements. The Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) maintains an ongoing inspection and audit program through Workplace Health and Safety Queensland where inspectors test compliance with the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995*.

Compliance auditing undertaken by inspectors is not a guarantee of a risk free workplace as a detailed examination of every hazard is not possible during an inspectors visit. The responsibility for ongoing effective health and safety management systems rests with workplace management.

The hazards addressed by inspectors during a compliance audit are determined by the workplace environment along with information obtained from specific inspectorate training, relevant injury data and industry input.

The outcomes of compliance audits conducted by inspectors give results that indicate if compliance is being achieved or if further actions are required to meet legislative standards.

Employers can undertake similar audits by reviewing the workplace operations using a risk management model. This assessment should be undertaken by appropriately trained internal staff or by external providers. Persons performing these reviews should have experience in hazard identification, risk assessments and possess a strong knowledge of current legislative requirements.

## Hazard specific audits

Hazard specific audits address particular issues such as confined space entry, or working at heights and involve the inspection and testing of current workplace control methods. This type of audit has a narrow focus and looks at the effectiveness of policies and procedures in dealing with specific hazards.

These audits differ from compliance audits in that the standards set by the organisation to address a risk of injury may exceed legislative requirements. Many organisations use suitably qualified external providers to undertake these types of audits especially when hazardous tasks are being undertaken.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland inspectors may review specific hazards in order to monitor legislative compliance at a workplace.

The *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* requires that workplace health and safety officers (WHSO's) conduct a hazard based assessment of the workplace using criteria approved by the Chief Executive of Workplace Health and Safety Queensland or criteria agreed to by the Workplace Health and Safety Committee at the workplace.

These assessments must be conducted at least once every twelve months, or at intervals agreed between the WHSO and the Health and Safety Committee. There are eight elements referred to under this criteria and includes a number of common workplace hazards:

1. Hazard identification, risk assessment and control
2. Work environment
3. Noise
4. Plant
5. Electrical
6. Hazardous substances
7. Manual tasks
8. Information, instruction, training and supervision

## Management system audit

An occupational health and safety management systems audit has a wider scope, and although addressing hazards and risk controls, it also looks at organisational structures, planning activities, responsibilities, implemented procedures, review cycles and measurement and evaluation issues.

A basic occupational health and safety management system has some of the following characteristics:

- Existence of a health and safety policy that is communicated to staff
- Management commitment
- Allocation of responsibilities and accountability for health and safety matters
- Controls for suppliers, sub-contractors and purchasing
- Health and safety consultation
- Hazard identification, evaluation and control
- Provision of information and training of staff
- Incident recording, investigation, analysis and review
- Measuring and evaluating workplace health and safety performance.

Many organisations undertake these audits on an annual basis as the amount of resources and time required to conduct a management systems audit can be substantial. These audits can be undertaken by appropriately trained internal staff or by an external third party.

## **Audit standards**

There are a number of audit standards available for employers to use such as Australian Standard 4801.

### ***Self-insurance audit standard***

The Department of Industrial Relations is responsible for the administration of the occupational health and safety performance requirements for current and prospective self-insurers. This role includes the accreditation of self-insurer auditors, coordination of audits with self-insurers and reporting of audit findings to Q-COMP.

Employers seeking a self-insurance licence from Q-COMP are required to have an assessment of occupational health and safety performance as part of licence requirements.

An element of this assessment process is a requirement for an OHS management systems audit. The standards that this audit is conducted against are detailed in the Performance Criteria and Guidelines for Workers' Compensation Self-Insurers.

Audits conducted for the purposes of self-insurance licence requirements are conducted by auditors accredited by the Department of Industrial Relations. Persons wishing to become accredited can apply to the Department of Industrial Relations after addressing the requirements set out in the Auditor Accreditation Criteria.

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