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# Safe housekeeping practices in the building and construction industry

Compliance campaign 2005 report

Phase one: February–March 2005

Phase two: May–June 2005

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Queensland **the Smart State**



## Executive summary

Between February/March and May/June 2005 a state-wide compliance campaign was conducted focussing on housekeeping in the construction industry.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) Inspectors conducted 574 assessments on housekeeping issues such as safe access and egress, adequate signage and public safety.

A significant finding of the campaign was that safe housekeeping is not effectively planned, implemented and monitored on many work sites. The frequency of failure to include housekeeping in Construction Workplace Plans and Work Method Statements was significant. Without a proactive structured approach to this issue through adequate planning, an ad hoc approach will ensue thus creating an unsafe work environment.

As a result of this compliance campaign, the key areas of concern for WHSQ and the Queensland building and construction industry are:

- unsafe work practices
- inadequate methods of cleanup including storage and disposal of waste management
- inadequate access and egress
- failure to plan appropriately for storage of tools
- deficiencies in testing and tagging of electrical equipment and
- inadequate use of appropriate signage.

There is a need to still focus on workplace plans and work method statements. This issue needs to be discussed with industry because of the implications for the building and construction industry associated with inadequate risk management and documented work procedures including nominated control measures.

It is therefore recommended that industry includes housekeeping, manual handling and fall issues at the planning stage of construction and building works. Once work commences, housekeeping, manual handling and fall issues need to be monitored to ensure they are current and suit the ever-changing work situation encountered on building and construction sites.

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## Introduction

Between February–March and May–June 2005 a state wide compliance campaign was conducted focussing on housekeeping in the construction industry.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) inspectors conducted 574 assessments on housekeeping issues such as safe access and egress, adequate signage and public safety.

The evidence gathered in this campaign is intended to be used by WHSQ in further work towards the reduction of injuries and fatalities within the Queensland construction industry.

## Background

The construction industry in Queensland employs 155,800 workers with approximately 98,700 employees and 45,100 self-employed persons (Construction Industry Action Plan 2004–2007, p. 3). Injury data indicates that slip, trips and falls are some of the key causes of injury in the building and construction industry. Falls on the same level are the second most frequent cause of injury in the Queensland construction industry, causing 14.2 percent of all injuries in 2002–03. These issues are often related to housekeeping practices. WHSQ seeks to reduce the instances of injuries by implementing state-wide compliance campaigns designed to assess health and safety performance in the building and construction industry. The outcomes from these campaigns allow WHSQ to be better positioned to advise industry on its health and safety performance.

Because of the high incidence of slips trips and falls, a state wide compliance campaign focussing on housekeeping in the building and construction industry was developed and initiated. Not only did the rationale for this campaign consider the high number of incidents associated with slips, trips and falls, it was supported with evidence from workers' compensation data.

Recorded complaints from the public to WHSQ concerning housekeeping matters were reviewed before the campaign commenced to determine if there were any common issues being identified.

This compliance campaign presented WHSQ with an opportunity to gauge how successful the building and construction industry was at complying with specific regulations that address the issue of housekeeping. This compliance campaign was conducted in two phases, with a two-month interval between campaigns, thus allowing for a comparison between the compliance campaign results.

The housekeeping compliance campaign is one of the five target health and safety campaigns planned for 2004–06, as highlighted in the Construction Industry Action Plan 2004–2007.

## Housekeeping/regulation

In 2001, new regulations for the building and construction industry commenced including Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 1997, Part 8A – Safe housekeeping practices for construction work.

In simple terms, the regulations in this part set out the requirements for principal contractors, employers and self-employed people at construction workplaces to ensure their worksites have safe housekeeping practices. The following regulations formed the basis of the compliance aspect of the campaign.

Regulation 65V, which requires a principal contractor to:

- ensure safe access and egress to and from workplaces
- erect adequate numbers of general safety signs
- ensure there is a safe system for collecting, storing and disposing of waste materials
- ensure there is enough area to safely store materials or plant which is to be used
- establish and maintain an orderly workplace environment.

Regulation 65X requires an employer or self employed person to establish safe housekeeping practices and maintain an orderly work environment (except to the extent of the Principal Contractor's obligations for housekeeping) to:

- ensure that means of access are safe and clear
- erect general safety signs and keep them in good order
- ensure there is a safe system for collecting, storing and disposing of waste materials
- ensuring there are safe storage areas for materials and plant and
- making safe protruding objects that are a hazard.

### Aim of campaign

The primary aim of this state-wide compliance campaign was to ascertain the extent of compliance within the industry against the current statutory provisions for housekeeping. Ancillary aims of the campaign were to:

- alert and inform the building and construction industry to the potential of injuries to workers from housekeeping hazards
- reduce injury potential from housekeeping hazards by way of the inspector identifying hazards, and
- make comparisons between the two phases.

### Strategy

The campaign was conducted for implementation in two phases. The first stage commenced in February 2005 and ran for approximately six weeks and the second stage commenced in May 2005 and also ran for approximately six weeks. The construction workplaces selected for visits for both phases were selected at random. Often, the same builder was encountered during both phases although in differing workplaces.

The strategy required a dedicated number of construction inspectors to be fully briefed on the statutory provisions relating to housekeeping, the appropriate enforcement actions to be taken where non-compliance was identified and the appropriate advice to be delivered should it be requested. This approach ensured consistency in the interaction between the inspector and the builders.

Although the intent of the compliance campaign was for the inspector to focus primarily on housekeeping issues, it is acknowledged that inspectors needed to address other hazards as they were identified during the visit. It was anticipated that hazards such as the following would be identified and would require possible intervention on the part of the inspector:

- ergonomics hazards
- falls from height hazards
- common plant hazards
- electrical hazards.

WHSQ consulted with people directly involved with the industry and this included the Queensland Master Builders' Association, the Housing Industry Association, the Civil Contractors' Federation, the Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union and the Builders' Labourers Federation.

The compliance campaign was preceded by a media promotion. This promotion involved an article in The Courier Mail, a Ministerial Press Release and electronic flyers released by the Queensland Master Builders' Association. The media promotion was an extension of the consultation WHSQ had undertaken with industry on the issue of housekeeping.

## Compliance checklist

A comprehensive compliance checklist was developed by the Construction Strategy Group in consultation with construction inspectors. This compliance checklist was piloted prior to the first phase commencing and the assessment criteria used in the compliance checklist received some minor adjustments.

The checklist was used by all inspectors to record compliance results during each visit. This ensured consistency among the inspectors when dealing with builders and ensured that similar issues were being assessed at the time of each visit.

The key management groupings included in the checklist were:

- housekeeping general
- supply arrangements
- waste removal
- mechanical lifting
- storage areas
- ergonomics knowledge.

A copy of the checklist used during the audits is attached as Appendix 1.

In January 2005, before starting the first phase of the compliance campaign, all construction inspectors participated in inspector training and information briefing sessions. In mid-June a debriefing of inspectors involved in the audit, was conducted and comments from these debriefings are included in this report.

## Results

A combined total of 574 workplaces were visited in both phases of the campaign. During the first phase, which was conducted from February to March 2005, WHSQ construction inspectors assessed 279 workplaces. During phase two, which was conducted from May to June 2005, 295 workplaces were assessed.

Inspectors were required to estimate approximately the number of workers that were exposed to hazards associated with housekeeping during their visits. The total estimation was 17001 workers who were directly exposed to housekeeping hazards. This estimate is based on numbers of workers present at the sites on the day of the audit and which were directly exposed to housekeeping hazards.

The workplaces visited in phase one were in the following sectors:

- 106 commercial
- 153 residential
- 20 civil construction.

Obligation holders encountered on the sites which were subject to compliance with Part 8A – Safe housekeeping practices for construction work were:

- 247 Principal Contractors
- 32 Employers/Self-Employed Persons (sub-contractors).

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<sup>1</sup> On average 3 workers per workplace.

The workplaces visited in phase two were in the following sectors:

- 78 commercial
- 198 residential
- 19 civil construction workplaces.

Obligation holders encountered on the sites which were subject to compliance with Part 8A – Safe housekeeping practices for construction work were:

- 267 Principal Contractors
- 28 Employers/Self-Employed Persons (sub-contractors).

From the audits, inspectors identified a total of 155 non-compliances in phase one and a total of 89 non-compliances in phase two. All of the non-compliances required issuing of a formal notice in the form of a written notification of non-compliance. Notices addressed diverse housekeeping issues such as failure to monitor site safety and uncontrolled access to areas of the workplace that presented a risk of exposure to members of the public.

These non-compliances are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Type and Number of Notices Issued: Stage 1

	Prohibition notice	Improvement notice	Infringement	Verbal direction	Total
Part 8–Plans & Induction	0	13	4	0	17
Part 8A-					
Access	1	9	1	8	19
Signage	0	5	0	1	6
Waste	0	10	0	2	12
General issues-plant etc.	0	12	6	1	19
Public safety etc.	0	3	0	2	5
Totals	1	52	11	14	78

The term “non-compliance” for the purpose of this report means that a hazard and an associated risk were identified and as a consequence, one or more notices were issued against an obligation holder.

It was found that in phase one there was a non-compliance factor of 0.562. Notices issued for non-compliance specific to housekeeping were 50 percent.

The remaining notices issued were for recognised hazard areas such as:

- falls from a height (15%)
- common plant (14%)
- electrical (10%)
- lack of documentation for tilt panel work, unsafe system for erecting formwork, construction amenities and poor guarding for men and material hoist (11%).

Table 2: Type and Number of Notices Issued: Stage 2

	Prohibition notice	Improve-ment notice	Infringement	Verbal direction	Total
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<sup>2</sup> The non-compliance factor is derived by the number of notices issued per workplace visited e.g.

$$\left( \frac{155}{279} = 0.56 \right)$$

Part 8–Plans & Induction	0	9	0	0	9
Part 8A-					
Access	0	4	1	1	6
Signage	0	17	0	0	17
Waste	0	6	0	2	8
General issues-Plant etc.	0	13	2	0	15
Public safety etc.	0	5	0	1	6
Totals	0	54	3	4	61

Table 2 shows that more than 50 percent of notices issued in phase two were issued against signage and general issues, which is a major shift from phase one. The instances of public safety and access issues decreased in this round of assessments.

The non-compliance factor in phase two was found to be 0.30. This indicates a reduction in non-compliance between phase one and phase two assessments.

Almost 70 percent of notices issued in phase two were issued against housekeeping. The remaining issued notices were issued against specific recognised hazard areas such as:

- falls from a height (11%)
- common plant (18%)
- electrical (13%)
- miscellaneous (e.g. unsafe removal of asbestos, deficient controls, and operating a mobile crane with out a dogger when needed) (2%).

## Access

This issue was identified by the inspectorate as an issue that the construction industry, as a whole, needs to improve worker safety. It is an issue that continually surfaces during normal inspector visits.

There was a reduction in commercial sites visited for phase two as opposed to phase one, this could account for the differences in non-compliance associated with the issue of access.

## Signage

On a number of sites, signage was identified as an issue that required improvement. There were observations from some workers that too much signage created a careless approach to the work environment, eg "...if there is a danger, a sign will be posted". On other sites, the opposite applied. Workers emphasised the importance of sending the right message about risks at the worksite, and supported appropriate signage alerting to hazards present and the wearing of personal protective equipment.

While signage was often overlooked, most obligation holders had no hesitation in providing signage once the deficiency was identified.

## Waste disposal

Many workplaces now incorporate waste bins and special areas for waste collections. Inspectors have seen a marked improvement in recent years in waste storage and collection.

It was found that many workplaces employ external sub-contractors for waste management and this was evident across all industry sectors e.g. civil, commercial and domestic construction. Construction inspectors identified that the use of a designated sub-contractor

for the purpose of waste management and site cleanup was a notable improvement in the construction industry and is increasing in prevalence in the domestic construction sector.

## General issues and plant

This aspect of the compliance campaign covered the issue of storage - specifically, adequate areas to safely store materials or plant.

In many cases, inspectors found that poor housekeeping practices had a flow on effect to other areas of the workplace. For example, the lack of waste bins resulted in scattered waste over work areas which in turn resulted in access and egress issues. Where this was allowed to occur, it was a strong indicator that there was an obvious failure to monitor housekeeping practices.

## Discussion

In both phases of this compliance campaign, WHSQ's construction inspectors identified a significant number of potentially hazardous issues requiring the issuing of 244 notices to ensure compliance. It is reasonable to assume that in some instances, if no action was taken, an injury may have resulted from these non-compliances. Given the high rate of non-compliance in both phases and the continuing number of notified incidents to WHSQ associated with housekeeping issues, there is an indication that poor housekeeping practices continue to pose a significant risk to workers at building and construction sites.

A total of 574 (279 + 295) housekeeping assessments were undertaken over the two phases of the statewide compliance campaign with a total of 244 (155 + 89) non-compliance issues identified and addressed.

Between phase one and phase two there was an improvement in the non-compliance rate of approximately 25percent.

It was felt that the media campaign coupled with the staging of the compliance campaign over a period of six months, increased awareness levels of housekeeping.

An area of concern was that, even though housekeeping was included in 'Work Method Statements' (WMS), the necessary controls were not put into place nor their effectiveness monitored. This is an important issue given the dynamics to which a site is subjected.

## Conclusions

Inspectors found that many workplaces had inadequate systems for collecting, storing and disposing of excess or waste materials. Many workplaces also failed to ensure that there was enough area to safely store materials and plant at the workplace. As previously explained, these issues have a flow on effect which is particularly acute on tight, congested sites. The planning for, and the provision of designated areas for storage of deliveries, including the scheduling of deliveries, needs to be conducted in a planned manner and constantly monitored. It was identified that provisions need to be made for the cleanup of waste and materials and that this needs to occur as work progresses, with a general cleanup at the end of each day.

Ergonomics risks are a significant issue on building and construction work sites due to the high manual handling requirements associated with this type of work activity. The campaign found that there is a lack of appreciation of ergonomics on building and construction sites. There needs to be an increased awareness of what can result from poor ergonomics practices and this should be coupled with an understanding of how to conduct ergonomics risk assessments where manual handling presents a risk.

Such assessments would lead to better control of manual task risks and result in improvements in:

- the use of mechanical lifting devices
- unloading of vehicles
- movement of materials around the site
- handling of materials to be removed from the site.

Falls from heights were found to be a recurrent serious risk in many of the workplaces audited. Considering the amount of legislative, enforcement and education effort that has gone into this area, this is still cause for concern.

The key areas of concern for WHSQ and the Queensland building and construction industry are:

- unsafe work practices
- inadequate methods of cleanup including storage and disposal of waste management
- inadequate access and egress
- failure to plan appropriately for storage of tools
- deficiencies in testing and tagging of electrical equipment
- inadequate use of appropriate signage.

It is therefore recommended that industry includes housekeeping, manual handling and fall issues at the planning stage of construction and building works. Once work commences, housekeeping, manual handling and fall issues need to be monitored to ensure they are current and suit the ever-changing work situation encountered on building and construction sites.

## Appendix 1

### Housekeeping Checklist - Construction Workplaces

Use this form for either a PC or Employer / Self-Employed person (circle one)

Housekeeping (general)		Yes	No	N/A	Comments	Act/Reg
1.1	Is housekeeping covered in the CWP / WMS?					R s56(i)
1.2	Safety signs adequate?					R 65v or x
1.3	Are work areas tidy?					R: Part 8A
1.4	Are access-ways and scaffolds easily accessible and clear of debris?					A: s30 R: Part 8A R: s65ZA
Supply Arrangements		Yes	No	N/A	Comments	Act/Reg
2.1	Is there a designated area for the delivery of items?					
2.2	Is this area easily accessible and clear of debris?					A: s30 R: Part 8A
2.3	Are there any mechanical lifting devices to assist in unloading deliveries? (eg crane, forklift etc)					
2.4	Are there any mechanical lifting devices to assist in carrying load to work area? (eg wheelbarrow, materials hoist etc)					
Waste Removal		Yes	No	N/A	Comments	Act/Reg
3.1	Are there waste bins/rubbish chutes available close to all work areas?					R: Part 8A
3.2	Is there a designated area for the storage of waste products?					R: Part 8A
3.3	Is this area easily accessible and clear of debris?					A: s30 R: Part 8A
3.4	For large items, are mechanical lifting devices available to assist in carrying loads to waste areas? (eg crane, materials hoist etc)					
3.5	Is waste lowered – not thrown from height?					
Mechanical lifting		Yes	No	N/A	Comments	Act/Reg
4.1	Are there mechanical lifting devices provided to assist workers when lifting items?					
4.2	Is a clear path provided between the storage area and work area?					A: s30 R: Part 8A
Storage Areas		Yes	No	N/A	Comments	Act/Reg
5.1	Are there designated areas to store tools, equipment, materials etc?					R: Part 8A
5.2	Are these areas easily accessible and clear of debris?					A: s30 R: Part 8A
Ergonomics knowledge		Yes	No	N/A	Comments	Act/Reg
6.1	Do workers understand ergonomics? (eg layout of work area, use of mechanical lifting devices where possible etc)					