

Workplace Safety in Australia

Your guide to safety



Developed by PMFresh Pty Ltd pursuant to an enforceable undertaking with SafeWork NSW.



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Working in Australia

Introduction

If you are planning to work in Australia, this guide is for you. It is an overview of workplace safety and outlines your rights and your responsibilities.



Your Rights

Everyone has the right to work in a **safe workplace**. You should be able to go home healthy and safe every day.

The law requires all employers to provide a safe workplace. What does that mean? It means that employers must do everything '**reasonably practicable**' to make the workplace safe. That means identifying **hazards**, eliminating them or making them as safe as possible if they cannot be eliminated and putting a **system** in place so that everyone knows how to work safely.

Consultation and Involvement

You have the right to raise safety issues and concerns and to be given the information you require to work safely. This may involve toolbox meetings (where everyone stops work and discusses a safety topic) or having a noticeboard where you can read the latest safety information for the workplace.

If you see something unsafe, you have the responsibility to raise it with your supervisor or manager. If you don't, and someone is injured, you may be held responsible.

Your employer has the responsibility to review, assess and control the safety issue identified.

Example: What is reasonably practicable?

A work task requires 50kg objects to be moved. The hazard is the heavy object; the risk is that a worker will suffer a back injury from lifting the heavy object.

- Can the risk be eliminated? No, if you take the object away, there is no work!
- Can the risk be reduced? Yes. You can use a 'control' such as a trolley, a forklift or two people can lift the object. There are ways of making the job task safer.

Example: Resolving issues

You identify that a machine is faulty, and you're worried it might break and injure you or someone else. You raise the issue with your supervisor.

Your employer has the responsibility to review, assess and control the safety risk, and should give you feedback on their proposed actions.

You have the right to raise safety issues with SafeWork NSW if you have a genuine belief that your employer is not acting on a critical safety risk.

Accessing Information

You need the right information. How do you work safely? You might be given procedures to follow, or guidebooks to read or refer to as required.

You should always have access to a manager or supervisor, who you can ask for help.

You will never be in trouble for asking for help. In fact, asking for help is very important.

It might save you or a colleague from a serious injury.

Responsibilities

Keeping yourself safe

The law says you need to look after your own safety. That means if you realise that you are about to get hurt, you must stop what you are doing. Don't keep working and end up with an injury. *Stop and be safe.*

Keeping others safe

You are responsible for other workers, and anyone near you. If your actions hurt someone else, physically or mentally, you might be held responsible and you could be prosecuted. If you see someone is about to get hurt, stop and try to help them. Think about what you are doing. Could it hurt anyone?

Following procedures

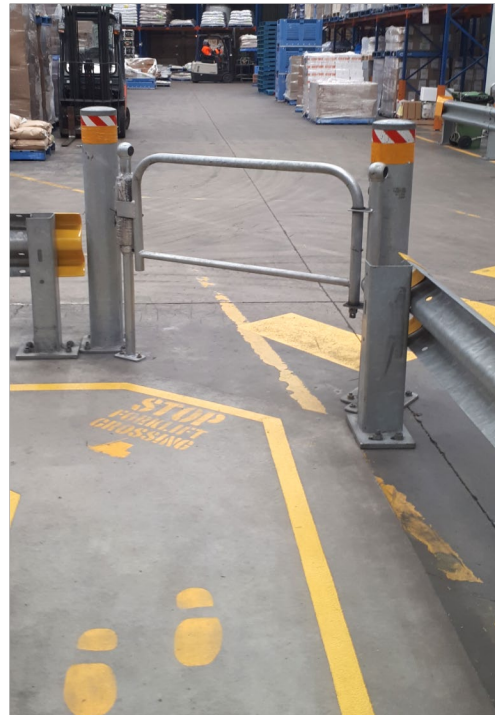
You are legally required to follow the reasonable procedures given to you by your employer, unless it is going to hurt you or someone else. Processes may be perceived as boring or time consuming, but if you don't follow a procedure, and someone gets hurt, you can be prosecuted.

Following directions

Just like procedures, if you are told to do something for safety, you must do it unless it could hurt you or someone else. For example, if your supervisor tells you to wear hearing protection, you need to wear it. It's important that you follow directions.

Stopping, when it's not working.

It is your responsibility to stop working if you believe you or someone else is about to be injured, or if something is about to go wrong. You must also report all incidents, injuries and **near misses**.



Workplace Risks

There are many risks in the workplace, but here are some key high-risk issues, and how they are typically controlled:

- Working at heights: Fall protection is required. Scaffolds or harnesses if you are working on a roof or structure. Using the correct ladder and keeping three points of contact. Working on the ground where possible.
- Electric Shock: Equipment must be tested and tagged and inspected to ensure it is safe. Safety switches and Residual Current Devices (RCDs) are used to minimize the risk of shock.
- Dangerous Goods/Chemicals: Knowing what you're using is the most important step. If you don't know, don't use it. Ask questions. *What is it? What can it do to me? What do I need to do to protect myself?* This information is found in a Safety Data Sheet (SDS). These should be available whenever you need to use a chemical.
- Forklifts: Forklifts move quickly and can change direction very quickly. They can also be very quiet. Never use your phone while anywhere near a forklift (as you'll be distracted). Watch, listen and make eye contact with the forklift driver before you move near a forklift.
- Vehicles: From driving on a road, to walking through a carpark, vehicles are very dangerous. Keep watching, listening and don't expect a driver will see you, even if you are wearing high visibility clothing.
- Manual Handling: Take care when lifting objects. Some may be too heavy to lift safely on your own, others are not too heavy, but may be awkward to carry. Trolleys should be used where possible. Always work within your limits. If it feels heavy, it may be too heavy!
- Noise: If you can't have a normal conversation because of the noise, it may be damaging your hearing. Wear earplugs or earmuffs. Ask your employer to give you earplugs if you are concerned.
- Dust/Asbestos Exposure: Be careful what you breathe in. Many older structures have asbestos materials in them, which have been found to cause asbestosis. If you are instructed to wear breathing apparatus or a face mask, follow the instructions.

Note: This is not an exhaustive list. For further information please see:

https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/resources_publications/model-codes-of-practice

Speaking up

If you don't understand what to do, or if you are unsure, ask! It is never disrespectful to raise a safety concern.

What do you do if no one listens?

Safety is more important than meeting a deadline. If you feel you are being ignored, talk to your manager, talk to their manager, and if you are still concerned, give SafeWork NSW a call on 13 10 50

Further information

For further information, please visit the following websites:

SafeWork NSW

<http://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/>

SafeWork Australia

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/>

Multicultural NSW

<https://multicultural.nsw.gov.au/>

Definitions: Key Safety Terms

You may hear these safety-related terms and concepts. Here's a quick overview of what they mean, and why they are important.

- **Audit:** A review of performance to set criteria. A safety audit involves an auditor checking to make sure a PCBU (Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking) is doing what it must do: checklists, inductions, training, risk management, etc.
- **Consultation:** Giving workers the chance to raise safety issues, and to be involved in making safety decisions (developing a safe work procedure, etc.)
- **Control:** Something used to make a hazard less dangerous. For example, working on a roof is a hazard. The potential outcome is a fall. Scaffolds/harnesses/edge protection/non-slip boots are controls which makes it less likely that you will fall while working on a roof.
- **Danger Tag / Lock out:** This is a tag or sticker placed on a machine to tell you that the machine is faulty or dangerous. Do not use any equipment if it has a danger tag on it. Wait until someone fixes the machine, makes it safe and removes the danger tag (never remove it yourself).
- **Hazard:** Anything that could cause an injury or damage. A hazard could be a ladder, a forklift, a knife, a stressful work environment, an angry customer or excessive noise.
- **Incident:** An event, usually unplanned, where someone is injured, something is damaged, or a 'near-miss' occurs (when someone is almost injured, or something is almost damaged – for example, a forklift almost hits someone, but they are pulled out of the way by a colleague at the last moment).
- **Risk:** The probability that something will happen. For example, the risk of falling off a roof is high, if you stand on the edge with no scaffolds in place. The risk is lower if you take safety precautions such as having a harness on, using a scaffold and you are standing a metre back from the edge.
- **Risk Assessment:** A thorough review of a hazard/risk, identifying what could go wrong and how best to eliminate or reduce the risks of a hazard.
- **Safe Operating Procedure:** A clear set of steps designed so that everyone can follow each step in a sequence, to make sure everyone is safe.
- **Safe Work Method Statement:** A safe work procedure designed for high risk construction site.
- **Safe Work Procedure:** a document which outlines risks involved in a work task and indicates what safety controls you need to follow to stay safe.
- **Safety Data Sheet (SDS):** An overview of a chemical: what it does, how to use it safely, how to store it and what to do if you get it on your skin.
- **Test Tag:** A tag placed on an electrical cord/lead by a competent person, after the cord/lead has been tested to make sure it is in good working order. The tag will show when the next test is due, so you know if the equipment is safe to use (within date).
- **Toolbox talk:** A safety meeting, where safety issues are discussed, and everyone is given the opportunity to participate and raise safety issues and concerns.

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