



IR UPDATE

PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS IN THE WORKPLACE

Most Australian jurisdictions now have a code of practice for managing psychosocial hazards. Whether your jurisdiction has one or not, you are obliged, if you are a Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) or an officer or director of a PCBU, to comply with your duty of care or duty of due diligence. This will mean ensuring the provision of a safe working environment, safe plant and structures, safe systems of work, and ensuring that all of the other work health and safety obligations are met, so far as is reasonably practicable. This will include dealing with psychosocial hazards.

What counts as reasonably practicable will vary according to your circumstances. This will include:

- How likely it is a hazard or risk might occur.
- How much harm the hazard or risk might cause.
- What is known about the hazard or risk, and how to minimise or eliminate it.
- The availability of suitable ways to do so.
- The cost, including whether it is disproportionate to the risk.

Codes of practice (compliance codes in Victoria) provide guidance on what counts as 'reasonably practicable' for your workplace and are designed to help you to work out what steps you can take to meet those obligations. Rather than present a series of rules to comply with, they aim to help you work out for yourself what needs to be done in your workplace. They include useful resources such as examples of hazards and corresponding control measures, templates for anti-

bullying policies and a risk register, as well as worked examples including a small transport business.

WHAT ARE PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS?

A psychosocial hazard is a hazard that arises from or relates to design or management of work, the work environment or plant, or interactions at work, that could cause psychological harm. That is a very broad definition. Some examples of psychosocial harms are: depression, anxiety, burnout, PTSD, suicide, but also cardiovascular disorders and even musculoskeletal disorders.

Fortunately, the codes give specific examples of psychosocial hazards. There are codes of practice for these hazards for most of the jurisdictions in Australia and they all identify the same types of risks. These include:

- high / low job demands
- low job control
- poor job support or role clarity
- poor workplace relationships
- poor organisational change management
- poor organisational justice
- low recognition and reward
- remote and isolated work
- poor environmental conditions
- bullying, harassment, workplace violence
- violent or traumatic events

WHAT STEPS SHOULD YOU TAKE?

These are almost all areas that good managers will be concerned with addressing anyway, as good practice. Now that codes of practice are widely available, it would be prudent to ensure that any management efforts that deal with such matters consciously incorporate WHS

” You should incorporate psychosocial hazards in your WHS assessments and reviews. ”

concerns when they do so. That means applying the standard risk assessment steps: identify, assess, control, and review. Indeed, the codes expressly break their guidance down into these steps to follow that approach. There is also the usual WHS duty to consult at every stage and, again, the codes acknowledge and incorporate that.

RESOURCES

Check with your local regulator for additional resources. There are risk assessment surveys available, for example. Regulators in other States may also have useful information.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

If you don't already include psychosocial hazards in your WHS assessments and reviews, you should incorporate them as soon as possible. If you are working on any other processes (for example evaluating whether your business complies with the Respect@Work reforms or reviewing related policies), you should ensure managers are familiar with the code of practice for your jurisdiction. Further assistance can also be provided by contacting the AFRA helpline. ●