

Bullying & Harassment



HAZCON has recently conducted several successful training programs aimed at raising awareness of bullying and harassment in the workplace. The training programs also provide customised strategies for businesses to address these issues and develop policies and issue resolution procedures.

The definition of bullying is “any repeated unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety”. Harassment, by comparison, is defined as “any form of behaviour directed at another person that is unsolicited, unwelcomed or unreciprocated”. Section 21 of the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act 2004 specifically requires an employer to ‘provide and maintain for employees, so far as is reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risks to health’. Under this Act the definition of “health” has been broadened to include ‘psychological health’.

The recent prosecution of Cafe Vamp in Hawthorn underscores the seriousness with which WorkSafe now views these behaviours. In this particular case, the company concerned was fined \$220,000; the company director was fined \$30,000 and three employees were fined a total of \$85,000. The court heard that the victim of the extensive bullying, Brodie Panlock, died in September 2006 after jumping from a building. A coroner later found that she felt an “unbearable level of humiliation” from her relationship with one of her co-workers and that two other co-workers were “relentless in their efforts to demean her”. The judge in summary made the following comments: “This employee was subjected to vile behaviour in this toxic workplace. The bullying was persistent and vicious. The employer could have taken very simple measures to eliminate the bullying and the risks to health and safety by making clear that the behaviour was intolerable, and then enforcing this message. It did nothing. The employer had no systems in place to induct, train and supervise employees with respect to the risks of bullying”.

Bullying and harassment is an on-going occupational health and safety issue which requires appropriate policies and procedures to ensure compliance with Section 21 of the Victorian OHS Act 2004.

Meet the HAZCON Board



(Left-Right) Peter Attwood (CEO), Hayden Wing, Ian Good (Executive Directors), Vic Hill, Ruth Knight and Doug Rhodes (Non-executive Directors).

The HAZCON Board meets on a regular basis to plan some of our long term strategies for the company.

Plant Safety



Plant is a generic term covering items of equipment such as cranes, boilers, forklifts and manufacturing equipment. Interaction with plant is a leading cause of injury and fatalities within the workplace. The reason for these accidents is often a lack of hazard identification.

Items of plant could be capable of causing injury via a variety of mechanisms including cutting, crushing, entanglement, hot surfaces, electricity, noise or chemical fumes, etc. As such, it is vital that an assessment be conducted for each item of plant to identify these hazards and implement the appropriate control measures.

If you are interested in obtaining some additional assistance in relation to plant safety, please contact HAZCON on 1800 429 266.

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Soil Sampling and Site Clean-Ups



All businesses should now have in place hazard registers which identify the risks to people from their normal business activities and have actions in place to address these. But how many have considered the risks posed by the ground on which everyone works? As our understanding of the way chemicals interact with the soil has improved, so has the understanding of the risks posed by contaminants in the ground to people and the environment. How many have identified the risks to the environment that the business processes may pose if a leak was to occur?

Risks to the environment and risks from the environment are issues that should be regularly reviewed. Intrusive capital works require that the risks posed by the disturbed soils must be investigated and actioned where necessary. Changes to business processes (new chemicals, new product stock feeds or lower/changed emissions) should instigate a review of the environmental risks register. When moving into new premises, the condition of the site needs to be confirmed between all parties to ensure that it is safe to operate from, and that any previous occupier's issues are not inherited.

To best understand these issues, a site assessment is required which includes site soil testing. During site soil testing, the samples are sent to an accredited NATA laboratory for specific chemical analysis. Based upon the results of these tests, potential issues can be identified and solutions can be implemented.

There are specific regulations surrounding chemical concentrations in soils and sampling frequencies, and these vary for different land uses and off-site disposals of soils.

HAZCON can assist in planning and performing a site soil assessment that meets the needs of varying businesses and land uses.

For further information on soil sampling, please contact HAZCON on 1800 429 266.

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Successful Strategies for Managing Safety Culture at Work

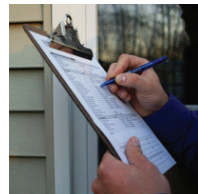


The question leaders should ask themselves is: 'Why should people follow me?'.

Leadership and culture are the key ingredients affecting the success or failure for any organisation. HAZCON has recognised this and has further developed training and support services to assist organisations improving their safety leadership and safety culture outcomes. Safety leadership and safety culture are not 'add-ons' to an organisation, they are intrinsic to its success. Any organisation can develop sophisticated safety systems but if the leadership and culture does not support the safety effort then it is doomed to failure.

The programs that HAZCON has developed focuses on these issues and includes understanding the nature and qualities of leadership and leaders; understanding the links between leadership and the people you are leading; understanding the components of culture and particularly safety culture and the links between leadership, teams and culture. These programs are further supported by improving the knowledge and understanding of safety management systems, risk management, legal compliance and management of contractors. By understanding the links between leadership, culture, systems and practices, leaders can positively affect their organisation and therefore improve safety outcomes, productivity, employee attitudes and morale.

Hazardous Materials Survey Prior to Demolition or Refurbishment



Hazardous materials audits which are broader than just asbestos audits can be very useful for determining the likely costs associated with demolition or refurbishment work. While the Victorian legislation states the requirement under OH&S Regulations Part 4.3 Asbestos to have an asbestos register prior to demolition or refurbishment, it does not require a hazardous materials audit. Hazardous materials cover a wide range of materials which pose a risk to health or to the environment such as Lead, Poly Chlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), Synthetic Mineral Fibres (SMF), treated timber or other potential contaminants such as biohazards, radioactive sources or chemical residues.

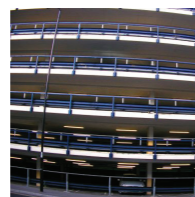
Some of the issues that are increasingly common is the presence of dusts dispersed around a old factory or workplace which contain appreciable levels of contaminants such as asbestos but include hazardous materials such as mercury from old switch gear or chemical residues such as pesticides, herbicides or hydrocarbon based products.

A thorough hazardous materials audit can provide the basis for calculating the amount of hazardous waste being generated; the likely disposal and decontamination requirements and any specific requirements such as a WorkSafe approved A Class asbestos removalists for cleaning up asbestos dust or debris. All of these can be a significant cost to a project.

HAZCON has been actively working with a number of government departments and larger construction companies on project planning involving the large scale demolition or refurbishment works on a number of high profile buildings and hospitals. The advantage of having qualified and professional consultants undertaking the work is that the risk of error is minimised and the clients start the project with a reasonable expectation that there will be no surprises on the project and that the costs are within the expected range.

Occupational Hygiene News

Carbon Monoxide and Carbon Dioxide Monitoring in Carparks



HAZCON has recently been involved in some interesting work relating to the air quality within indoor carparks. This monitoring has revealed detectable concentrations of contaminants such as carbon monoxide(CO). These concentrations are generally found to be highest in late afternoon when people are returning home from work. This peak is higher than the morning peak and is believed to be related to the warming up of engines prior to leaving the carpark.

If you are receiving complaints in relation to health effects associated with your carpark, it is possible that they may be related to air quality.

For further information on this issue please contact HAZCON on 1800 429 266.

Odours and Smells in Old Buildings



Odours and smells in buildings may be experienced by some people. Poor indoor air quality (IAQ) can result from inadequate ventilation; poorly maintained air conditioning systems; particles, gases and vapours at concentrations higher than outdoors; products from inside the building; leaking gas appliances; building materials and furnishings, and micro-organisms such as mould.

Health effects of inadequate indoor air quality are often poorly understood due to the large number of potential indoor air contaminants, the possibility of interactions between contaminants and on individual responses to them.

An indoor air quality assessment includes the measurement of temperature, relative humidity, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and air flow. Where the testing for other gases, dusts or specific substances (e.g. formaldehyde, volatile organic compounds, and mould) is required, specialised air sampling equipment is used. At times, it may be necessary to forward air or mould samples to accredited laboratories for analysis to assist in the determination of recommended controls.

Victoria's successful prosecutions of Directors, Managers and Supervisors sets a clear performance standard



The legislative framework has significantly changed over the last couple of years and there is an increasing number of successful prosecutions which clarify the roles and responsibilities placed on all levels of management by the occupational health and safety legislation.

The case of Rapid Roller and specifically the manager of the workplace, was significant as it was a case which resulted from a workplace fatality. The manager who was aware of the OH&S hazards and did nothing about them, subsequently picked up a liability for that omission. The significance of this was that the manager was not a senior officer of the company but had effective control over the workplace and systems of work.

In March of this year, there was a successful prosecution of Orbital Drilling which involved a significant fine for the company involved (\$750,000) and for an individual director (\$120,000). WorkSafe Victoria is also pursuing charges against the supervisor on the site and the results are not currently available.

The ramifications of these two cases are significant in that staff such as Directors, Managers and Supervisors of the companies involved have been charged and it sets out by precedence, the enforceable standards of occupational health and safety management which is expected to be in place in any organisation.

The message is clear, if you manage or control the workplace, then you need to have a very good idea of the hazards present and ways of controlling them adequately. Directors, Supervisors and Managers are now very clearly responsible for the level of OH&S performance within their workplaces.

Office Safety Inspections



Office environments are obviously 'safer' than most industrial environments, however there are a range of issues which should be addressed. These issues can be identified by conducting workplace inspections, and in particular office inspections. These include fire fighting (are extinguishers serviced?), electrical safety (does the organisation have a testing and tagging program?), chemical management (cleaning chemicals are common), manual handling (is there sufficient storage?), lighting, ventilation and ergonomics (do employees know how to correctly set up their desk?).

Any of these issues can result in workplace injuries and illnesses and lead to decreases in productivity. If you are receiving complaints relating to the office environment, a workplace inspection can identify the source of these issues. For further information, please contact HAZCON on 1800 429 266.

Traffic Management Procedures for Construction Works and Established Sites

It is recognised that traffic management in and around construction sites and work places is vital for the safety of employees, contractors and the public. If not controlled effectively, traffic management can cause serious injury or death, disruption to work and a decrease in productivity.

As such, HAZCON has developed programs that address the key issues of traffic management that includes understanding the risk associated with traffic management, applying key principles of risk management to traffic management and the links between controlling this risk and managing safety overall.

Traffic Management programs provide Supervisors, Managers and Leaders with the skills and confidence required to effectively manage the risks associated with traffic management in their workplace.