

Safety Management - Occupational Health & Safety Management Systems (OHSMS) >

The [Work Health Regulations](#) focus on a comprehensive approach to safety management, the responsibility for which rests with the employer. The objective is to create a safe workplace free from risk. This information bulletin explains what safety management is, the benefits and where to start.

What is an Occupational Health and Safety Management System (OHSMS)?

An OHSMS is a set of plans, actions and procedures to systematically manage health and safety in the workplace that is actively endorsed by a committed employer to achieve the following:

- Provision of a safe and healthy workplace and the prevention/reduction of illness and injury equally for employees and contractors.
- Identification of workplace hazards, assessment and control of all risks.
- Active involvement in health and safety matters by managers, supervisors and employees and their representatives.
- Provision of information and training for employees at all levels so they can work safely.
- Audit and review of the OHSMS.

Why should organisations be interested in OHSMS?

The purpose of an OHSMS is to systematically eliminate the possibility of accident, illness, injury or fatality in the workplace by ensuring that the hazards in the workplace are eliminated or controlled in a systematic manner, rather than waiting for a crisis to occur.

Employers have legal responsibilities to provide a safe workplace and systems of work, to consult with employees and to keep them informed about health and safety matters.

Small businesses can use an OHSMS to meet their need to prevent injuries, illness and accidents.

What are the benefits?

The primary benefit in implementing an OHSMS is the assistance it can provide in meeting the moral and legal responsibilities of employers.

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Benefits include:

- Prevention of occupational injury and disease.
- Reduced loss of working days due to injury and accidents.
- Lowered incidence of employee's compensation claims.
- Minimised work stoppages due to safety disputes.
- Improved work methods and worker morale thus leading to improved productivity.
- A framework for meeting legislative responsibilities.

What are the legal obligations?

Implementation of an OHSMS does not exempt an employer from meeting the requirements of the [Work Health Act](#) and [Work Health \(Occupational Health and Safety\) Regulations](#). An OHSMS is not a substitute for the law or the outcomes required by the law. However an OHSMS should help you meet your legal obligations.

The duty of care in Occupational Health and Safety legislation is outcome based and the OHSMS is essentially a way of managing OHS, or a process that should be followed.

What makes an OHSMS work?

- Research on the effectiveness of OHSMS has consistently pointed to the importance of top management having genuine commitment, to achieve and maintain an effective system that goes beyond mere legislative compliance.
- An effective OHSMS requires active involvement with an emphasis on activity at all stages of OHS operations. It includes broad consultation with the workforce and active involvement of 'key' people such as management, supervisors, health and safety representatives, and OHS Committees.
- The importance of having people to take on role of 'champion' such as a senior manager or union representative should not be underestimated.
- It is important to put effort into continuous improvement, which is building in ways of periodically checking how you are doing and how to improve your system, using feedback mechanisms, audits and inspections.
- Developing a structured training strategy, with the ability to meet different language and education needs is a significant factor to attaining success.
- An effective system is more than a paper chase. It is about making sure that relevant changes occur, to improve OHS. However, documenting what you do is good business practice.

Five reasons why OHSMS succeed

- 1) The OHSMS is directly aimed at managing critical risks and any other reasons for its existence are secondary.
- 2) Senior managers or owner/operators practice what they preach and make decisions to eliminate or reduce hazards.
- 3) Supervisors and employees understand their role in the system and are closely involved in its development and operation.
- 4) The system is commensurate with the risks to be managed and is absolutely tailored to the organisation's requirements.
- 5) The OHSMS is able to withstand, and welcomes, robust questioning and review from everyone involved.

Five reasons why OHSMS fail

- 1) Management support is irregular and inconsistent.
- 2) Everyone treats the system as “paper warfare” and follow procedures to keep the bosses happy regardless of their effectiveness.
- 3) The OHSMS is established in response to external demands and never really “owned” or understood by those subject to it.
- 4) The system is imposed without effective participation by those who have to make it work.
- 5) The effort to build an organisation specific system is not made and “off the shelf” solutions are applied that have little relevance to the culture of the workplace.

Where to start

NT WorkSafe provides advice and assistance to employers to assist them to develop an OHSMS. NT WorkSafe also conducts a one day safety management workshop, which will assist you to get started.

To date the cornerstone to NT WorkSafe’s approach in assisting industry has been the NT WorkSafe publication Safety Management - A Guide. This guide is aimed at small business and incorporates self assessment questions to assist an organisation assess their level of compliance. NT WorkSafe Officers conduct audits against the elements of this guide and provide a report to the employer with recommended actions.

There are many different types of commercial OHS management and audit systems on the market. NT WorkSafe has Officers trained to audit against the Victorian Workcover SafetyMAP auditing criteria. Australian Standards have also developed Guidelines for Safety Management Systems ([AS 4804](#)).

Some companies have chosen to integrate their OHSMS with their own broader management systems. Many elements of OHS management are the same as those found in effective management principles/activities.

Whilst commercial off-the-shelf systems may simplify initial implementation, they may be difficult to adapt to a particular workplace or industry. Developing an OHSMS in-house however, may take up valuable staff (and management) resources.

Whether developed in-house or purchased off the shelf, an OHSMS is considered to be most effective when incorporated into an organisation’s overall management system, with corporate commitment and sufficient resources to back it up.

Such integration of the OHSMS will enable the drawing together of diverse business components such as engineering, safety design, purchasing, quality, risk management, personnel and finance.

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