Introduction

This book

*OHS at Work* is a practical guide for the health and safety professional to manage work health and safety in Australian organisations. It introduces the issues health and safety professionals are faced with when working in organisations in their efforts to improve the safety culture, and presents this discussion in light of this changing landscape to provide a guide for the health and safety professional.

Accredited qualifications

The practical nature of this book makes it ideal for students studying the Australian national curriculum at a TAFE, at an RTO, or in industry. This book, thus, can support the following qualifications and contribute to the following units of competency:

Qualifications:

Certificate III in Work Health and Safety  
Certificate IV in Work Health and Safety  
Diploma of Work Health and Safety  
Advanced Diploma of Work Health and Safety

Units of Competency

BSBWH501A Participate in OHS processes  
BSBWH502A Apply knowledge of OHS legislation in the workplace  
BSBOHS303B Contribute to OHS hazard identification and risk assessment  
BSBOHS304B Contribute to OHS hazard control  
BSBWH504A Participate effectively in OHS communication and consultative processes  
BSBWH505A Contribute to OHS issue resolution  
BSBOHS306A Contribute to implementing emergency prevention activities and response procedures  
BSBWH501A Monitor a safe workplace  
BSBWH502A Assist with compliance with OHS and other relevant laws  
BSBWH503A Contribute to the implementation of the OHS consultation process  
BSBWH504A Identify hazards and assess OHS risks  
BSBOHS404B Contribute to the implementation of strategies to control OHS risk  
BSBWH505A Contribute to the implementation of a systematic approach
to managing OHS
BSBWH501A Ensure a safe workplace
BSBWH502A Assist in the design and development of OHS participative arrangements
BSBWH503A Apply principles of OHS risk management
BSBWH504B Facilitate the application of principles of occupational health to control OHS risk
BSBWH505A Participate in the investigation of incidents
BSBOHS505B Manage hazards in the work environment
BSBWH507A Participate in the management of the OHS information and data systems
BSBOHS602B Develop OHS information and data analysis and reporting and recording processes
BSBWH503A Analyse and evaluate OHS risk
BSBWH605A Develop a systematic approach to managing OHS
BSBWH607A Apply ergonomic principles to control OHS risk
BSBWH608A Apply occupational hygiene principles to control OHS risk
BSBOHS609B Evaluate an organisation’s OHS performance

For additional details, and for assessment, consult with your chosen registered training organisation.

WHS in Australia

Currently in Australia there is an intensive focus on managing work health and safety with the adoption by the Commonwealth, two states and two territories in 2012 of the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (WHS Act 2011). This is a key part of the Council of Australian Governments’ 2008 agenda to harmonise individual state legislation to ‘cut red tape’ for organisations conducting business across multiple jurisdictions. The harmonising of health and safety law in Australia brings with it some new requirements, such as consultation about risks and workplace hazards with employees, and revitalises the health and safety professional’s role as a leader in imparting safety knowledge and ensuring that those working under them have sufficient skills in working safely. This book has been developed to act as a handbook for the health and safety professional to assist them in their role of ensuring that their organisation is not only compliant with Australian health and safety legislation, but also proactive in developing a robust safety culture.

The structure of this book

This book has been divided into three parts: Work Health and Safety Legislation, Managing Work Health and Safety, and Contemporary Issues.
Part I contains two chapters that introduce the problem and present an historical account of how safety legislation was developed in Australia as well as the current harmonisation of individual state regulation.

Chapter 1 introduces the problem of OHS management, and presents a contemporary view of managing workplace health and safety. This chapter then presents an argument to explain why we as a society are concerned about robust workplace health and safety practice. The role of the health and safety professional is introduced as important in improving work health and safety. The National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC) ten-year strategy 2002-2012 is reviewed, and the up-and-coming work health and safety strategy 2012-2022 is discussed. These strategies underpin workplace safety requirements and goals to reduce work-related injury and disease rates in Australian workplaces. This chapter also includes the workplace injury and fatality rates for each state, segregated by industry sector, between 2001 and 2010. Physical, mechanical and work organisation hazards are presented as well as the common injuries contained in workers’ compensation claims.

Chapter 2 presents an historical account of Australian work health and safety (WHS) laws to explain how they were developed. Australian WHS regulations are based on recommendations from the UK’s 1972 Robens Committee Inquiry on Safety and Health at Work. This chapter details the acts and regulations for each Australian state and territory. The Work Health and Safety Act 2011, which replaces the jurisdictional state-based occupational health and safety (OHS) Acts in Australia from 1 January 2012, is discussed in detail, with key parts of the legislation such as ‘consultation’ requirements fleshed out. This chapter presents the key features of the WHS Act together with an overview of the legislative requirements in light of the ‘duty of care’ concept that pervades the Act along with the expectation that employees are regularly consulted throughout the identification, management and review of workplace risk. It positions the WHS Act within the WHS 2012-2022 Strategy, currently in draft form. This chapter is the final chapter for Part I of this book.

Part II moves the discussion to the role of the health and safety professional and the demands and issues arising in carrying out this role. The three chapters outline the key responsibilities of the health and safety professional, the tools at their disposal, and the ways in which health and safety can be managed in organisations using multiple perspectives.

Chapter 3 addresses the management of workplace risk from medical, ergonomic, behavioural, organisational, industrial relations and legal perspectives. Workers generally seek some form of medical intervention when they experience a work-related injury. However, a treating medical practitioner can only assess the condition of the patient from the way in which they present and the information they provide. Accepting this
premise, the medical profession dominates the definition of injury, treatment and control. In regard to ergonomic control of work-related injury, there is significant variation between each individual’s physical makeup and capacity; therefore, there is a direct relationship between the person, environment and the equipment they use in the course of their work. Failure to recognise this relationship and ‘engineer out’ these risks has been a significant factor in muscular injuries. The work in behaviour modification techniques of health psychologists (Reber & Wallin 1984; Schein 1988) has built on the premise that promoting and maintaining safer individual behaviour will lead to a reduction in workplace injury, disease and death. The focus here is predominantly on changing and improving the behaviour of the individual worker, with little influence on those in managerial roles, and is widely criticised. Blame is squarely placed on the victim rather than the process, environment or work system (Dwyer 1983). Sociologists argue that injury is an inherent part of work; that work health and safety priorities come second to production and organisational profitability (Bahn & Barratt-Pugh 2009; James 1987); that medical and behavioural terminology supports these notions of the causation of workplace injury; and that injury arises through a clash between employer and employee interests (Dwyer 1983). Industrial sociologists blame ‘the system’ rather than the individual employee for workplace injury, disease and death. Finally, regulation of health and safety in Australia has become increasingly more litigious: this is evident in the number of cases that the Australian legal system is currently dealing with. Litigation is a harrowing and stressful activity for business and injured worker alike, which examines and tests human behaviour and workplace culture. The chapter concludes by presenting three explanations as to why injuries occur in the workplace, exploring technical, psychological and organisational reasons.

The discussion in Chapter 4 highlights the range of responsibilities of the health and safety professional. These include ensuring that workplace hazards have been identified, appropriate measures have been taken to address risks, control measures for risks are reviewed on a regular basis, risk management documentation complies with legislation, and workplace accidents are investigated in a timely manner. Risk management deals with the risks that have the probability of interrupting business, or causing injury or harm to the health of those in the workplace. Risk is divided into two categories, acceptable and unacceptable risk, and is managed and reduced by implementing sufficient controls. The final section of this chapter takes the reader through the process of incident investigation. Incidents are categorised as either near misses/hits, minor and major accidents that result in first aid, medically treated incidents, lost-time injuries, or death. A step-by-step process is provided on how to conduct an accident investigation.

The final chapter in Part II, Chapter 5, places a focus on injured employees addressing appropriate care, robust management of workers’ compensation
claims, and processes to ensure that injured employees are facilitated with appropriate return to work. Whilst prevention is the preferred method of addressing workplace risk, the occurrence of work-related injury and disease require intervention as per Australian health and safety legislation to provide injured workers with medical treatment, rehabilitation and financial security while in recovery. This chapter introduces workers’ compensation requirements in Australian workplaces and explains the duties of employers according to the legislation. That discussion leads to injury management and rehabilitation of injured workers so that they can successfully return to the workplace.

Part III concludes this book and has two chapters that discuss evaluation and performance of the health and safety professional as an activity to reduce work-related injury and disease. These chapters present contemporary issues that health and safety professionals are required to manage in an ever-changing workplace and offer research ideas and strategies that can assist with this process.

Chapter 6 addresses the concept of safety and health performance measurement, evaluation and benchmarking, and provides methods for the assessment of organisational safety and health performance. Most health and safety professionals battle with measures to validate organisational performance. The traditional approach, where work-related injury prevention strategies are based on the lessons learnt from accident investigation (lag indicators), is compared with the application of positive performance (lead) indicators that no longer need to wait for injuries to occur. Companies with sophisticated and robust safety culture have embraced positive performance indicators to support active organisational safety performance. This chapter presents discussion on and examples of some of the tools that health and safety professionals use to keep the worksite safe. The chapter also reviews these tools in the critical light of the WHS Act. Compliance with the WHS Act requires consultation with employees when assessing and managing risk, and this is paramount when choosing risk management systems. Behavioural-based approaches are reviewed along with risk management systems and safety training. This chapter outlines the complex role of the health and safety professional in the light of the WHS Act and provides discussion on strategies to assist those in this role. The health and safety professional’s role has moved from one of compliance to that of the skills-transfer expert, who has a responsibility to ensure all workers in their care are competent in their working roles, and within their environment, to be safe.

Chapter 7 distils the previous six chapters and presents the WHS Act in the light of implications for practice for the health and safety professional in improving work-related safety. It draws on the preceding chapters to present strategies to reduce work-related injury and increase robust organisational safety culture. It discusses risk management and the
responsibility of the OHS professional in the light of innovation, and of emerging issues such as environmental concerns, emotional health and wellbeing, stress, workplace bullying, occupational violence, carbon emissions and business bottom line. It presents a range of research ideas which will help the practitioner to move forward as an enlightened and effective health and safety professional.

I hope that you enjoy this book and find it useful, and that the information and strategies prove pivotal in reducing work-related injury and disease in Australian workplaces.

Susanne Bahn