

GUIDE TO MANAGING HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Managing the Organisation

Occupational Health and Safety

In 2008 the RHSV prepared material for a series of Heritage Victoria workshops and for the workshop publication *Heritage Keepers – Volunteer Training Program Resource Kit: a guide to managing your heritage organisation*. Most of the following information was originally published in *Heritage Keepers*.

This section outlines the principles involved in managing OH&S in your organisation.

Fundamental to these concepts is consultation and responsibility.

In a voluntary-run organisation with a volunteer committee of management it is the responsibility of the committee of management or its designate to implement the recommendations needed to “fix” any OH&S or risk management issues.

A voluntary-run organisation should establish an OH&S subcommittee, or report things that need to be done directly to the committee of management. A system needs to be developed for implementing actions to make your workplace safer. OH&S should become a regular item on the meeting agenda. It is poor process when volunteers take it upon themselves to fix the problem without some sort of monitoring, authority or consultation. Ultimately the committee of management is responsible for providing a safe workplace.

Throughout this section reference is made to employers, employees and contractors because the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)¹ was originally drafted with the paid workforce in mind, and because it is important to see the scope of people involved in OH&S. Should you have a contractor – perhaps on a grant-funded project – they must also be included in your OH&S responsibilities. We have also included committees of management and volunteers.

This section also includes some checklists to help in the identification of OH&S hazards. Checklists are indicative and not to be taken as comprehensive checklists for your organisation. Every situation is different and you should use the checklists here as a model to develop your own checklist. See the *Procedures* section of the Guide and look for the material under *Forms*.

The OH&S Act also stipulates that it is the responsibility of the employer, the committee of management, to ensure that specialised advice is taken in OH&S matters. Community groups can receive free consultations from accredited providers by contacting the Victorian Council for Social Service (VCOSS) on 9654050 or <http://www.vcross.org.au>. WorkSafe manages a range of grant schemes to assist voluntary organisations implement OH&S recommendations - <http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au>.

What is OH&S?

Occupational health and safety is about making sure that all employees and volunteers come home from work in the same state of health as they arrived.

¹ Occupational Health and Safety Act (Vic) 2004
http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/ohasa2004273/

This means that we are all responsible for making our workplaces safe—for everyone, everyday.

Everyone include employers, employees, volunteers, visitors and contractors.

What are Our Responsibilities?

Our responsibilities or ‘duty of care’ are explained in the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004(Vic) and include:

- a safe working environment and adequate welfare facilities
- information and instruction on workplace hazards and supervision of employees in safe work
- provision and maintenance of safe plant and systems of work
- monitoring the health of employees and related record-keeping
- employment of qualified persons to provide health and safety advice
- nomination of a senior employer representative
- monitoring conditions at any workplace under our control and management

How do we make our workplaces safe?

To make our workplaces safe we need to work together to find hazards (things that can hurt us) and control them (stop them from hurting us).

Sometimes incidents occur that tell us that something is wrong. It is important that we take all incidents seriously and that organisations work together to understand what happened so we can stop it from happening again.

We should perform three main tasks to make our workplaces safe:

1. Work together. This involves consultation, communication and information.
2. Identify and control hazards and risks. This is risk management.
3. Report and investigate all incidents

Working together – Consultation, Communication and Information

Consultation

Everyone should talk about safety, including employers, employees, volunteers, visitors and contractors.

Very often, employees and volunteers can make a significant contribution to identifying hazards, assessing risks and developing preventative measures for OH&S issues that arise in the workplace based on their experience and expertise.

It is a legal requirement for ‘employees’ to be consulted on health and safety matters that directly affect them. This includes:

- identifying or assessing hazards or risks
- deciding on measures to control risks
- deciding on the adequacy of employee facilities
- determining the membership of any OH&S committee
- proposing changes that may affect health and safety

Employers must also consult with independent contractors and their employees.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act 200(Vic) provides flexibility on how consultation can occur. A health and safety representative (HSR) may be elected, a health and safety committee may be established, and/or other agreed arrangements may be established; for example, safety could be an agenda item at a regular monthly meeting.

Meaningful and effective consultation requires employers to:

- share information with employees about the matter on which the employer is required to consult
- give employees a reasonable opportunity to express views about the matter
- take those views into account

Consultation might be around managing hazards and incidents, writing OH&S policies and procedures, conducting workplace inspections or developing induction and training materials.

Records should be kept of meetings and the issues raised therein together with actions to be implemented and responsibility for these action identified.

Communication

It is important to communicate effectively about health and safety matters with everyone in the organisation.

Effective means of communication will vary depending upon the size and nature of the organisation.

Clear, straightforward policies and procedures are the foundation of good OH&S management systems and training programs.

A policy states the objectives the organisation would like to achieve: an ‘injury-free workplace’; a ‘smoke-free workplace’; or a ‘violence-free workplace’ are some examples.

A procedure sets out the steps involved in putting the policy into practice; for example, working alone, electrical safety or safe lifting.

Policies and procedures don’t work if people don’t have input into their development or don’t know about them. Once procedures have been developed and documented they must be communicated to the relevant people, including visitors and contractors.

Examples of OH&S procedures that might be applicable to your workplace include:

- OH&S induction
- OH&S training
- consultation
- fire and other emergencies
- first aid
- hazardous chemicals
- manual handling
- contractor safety

For more information on developing OH&S policies and procedures, refer to page 14 of the WorkSafe Victoria guide - *Working Safely in Community Services*².

Induction and training

All volunteers and employees should be inducted and trained into their roles. Induction and training should cover all aspects of safety and emergency procedures. Induction should occur upon commencement with the organisation.

Volunteers must be informed of any hazards and risks involved in the tasks that they perform and any current hazards that exist within building premises.

Managing Hazards

What is a hazard?

A hazard is anything that has the potential to cause harm to people or the environment.

Common examples of hazards in our workplaces include:

- electrical – frayed cords, overloaded power points, water and electricity mixed together
- manual handling – lifting and moving heavy or awkward things like computers, cartons, tables and bags in and out of the car
- physical – strings, plastic, boxes and cords on the floor, sharp edges
- chemical – cleaning fluids
- psychological – fatigue, harassment or bullying

Identifying hazards

Hazards can be found or identified in a number of ways including:

- general observation
- reports from others (internally and externally)
- inspections carried out in the workplace
- incident reports or registers maintained in the workplace

Managing hazards

The best way to manage hazards is to follow this easy -step process:

1. *Find the hazard* – be observant. Look out for yourself and each other.
2. *Think about the hazard* – is it dangerous? Who can it hurt? What do I need to do to remove it or make it safer?
3. *Fix the hazard* – If you can, get rid of it. If not, try and control it or tell someone who can help you.

² Working safely in community services - http://www.asushop.asn.au/files/Working_Safely_in_Community_Services.pdf

Here is a quick and easy example:

You are walking through the office and trip (but don't fall) on the corner of a box that is sticking out from underneath a table.

1. *Find the hazard* – the box.
2. *Think about the hazard* – It is dangerous where it is because someone else could trip on it and maybe fall over and hurt themselves. It needs to be moved.
3. *Fix the hazard* – Move the box out of the way so that the walkway is clear.

Here is another example... of what not to do!

You sit on a wobbly chair in a meeting. It is a bit uncomfortable, but you think it will be ok... you don't want to make a fuss. The next day a visitor attends the office for a meeting and sits in the chair. It breaks and they fall on the floor and sprain their wrist.

What should you have done?

1. *Find the hazard* – The broken chair.
2. *Think about the hazard* – It is dangerous, it is not stable. I should do something about it because the next person who sits in this chair might be heavier than me. It needs to be taken out of the meeting room.
3. *Fix the hazard* – Remove the chair from the meeting room, stick a sign on it such as “Do not use – Faulty Chair”. Report it to your line manager so that it can be repaired.
4. *Record-keeping* – Complete a Hazard-Risk Register to make sure it is followed up.

First Aid

Many organisations consider that first aid training is important for their staff and volunteers in case of medical emergencies in the workplace. First aid training is available through ambulance services.

WorkSafe Victoria (<http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au>) has a code of practice for first aid and provides a list of items a basic first aid kit should include.

A code of practice cannot prescribe the contents of a first aid kit. Appropriate first aid facilities will vary from one workplace to the next.

In most workplaces the following items are likely to be included in a basic first aid kit:

- Emergency services telephone numbers and addresses
- Name and telephone number of workplace first aiders
- Basic first aid notes
- Individually wrapped sterile adhesive dressing
- Sterile eye pads
- Sterile covering for serious wounds
- Triangular bandages
- Safety pins
- Small sterile un-medicated wound dressing
- Medium sterile un-medicated wound dressing
- Large sterile un-medicated wound dressing

- Adhesive tape
- Rubber thread or crepe bandage
- Disposable gloves
- Scissors

Depending on the activities undertaken by the organisation, additional materials may be required.

It is always a good idea to have people trained in first aid. It may be that you have people in your membership ranks already trained. Obviously, with the part-time nature of volunteer organisations you do not normally have the luxury of full-time staff, who would be the best choices as first aid officers.

If you are not close to emergency services or medical help then you should definitely consider first aid training for volunteers in your organisation.

First aid training can be expensive but there are lots of options for cheap training. Check with local councils and neighbourhood houses, which often run courses.

First aid kits should be well stocked and maintained regularly. A blood spill kit containing latex gloves, eye protection, disposable cloths and possibly a sanitiser should be provided to enable the safe clean-up of any blood or other body fluids. Remember, we must assume that everybody has something contagious!

Report all incidents when first aid is required.

Common OH&S Hazards

Fire and other emergencies

All volunteers in your organisation need to be aware of fire and emergency procedures and they need to know on day one!

A formal induction that covers all emergency procedures and other OH&S issues needs to be conducted with all new volunteers (and existing ones, if this has not already been done). They, along with the person giving the induction, should sign to say that they have completed it.

A clear floor plan showing emergency exits, fire fighting equipment and assembly points used for evacuations should be placed in each area.

Install fire extinguishers and signs above them (see MFB web site³); install them near greatest hazards and entrances. If possible have the company providing the extinguishers give you instruction on using them.

Install exit signs; if possible, illuminated ones. Keep all exits and extinguishers clear of obstacles at all times.

You should hold practice evacuations three or four times per year. Evacuate the whole building and make sure everyone gets to the assembly point. Check all rooms as you exit the building and don't forget the toilets!

Select an assembly point that is far enough away from the building and that does not impede the arrival of emergency vehicles.

People should not re-enter the building until directed to do so.

³ Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board - <http://www.mfb.vic.gov.au>

The practice evacuations should be analysed to see if any improvements can be made.

Make sure that all smoke detectors are in working order. Remember to change the batteries when daylight saving starts or finishes.

Train all staff to follow established procedures. Consult with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade or your local CFA for further advice.

Occupational Violence

Occupational violence is more common than we might like to believe. Some simple things we can do to try to minimise harm to ourselves and others include:

- preventing visitors entering reception by barrier of desk, counter, etc.
- training all staff/volunteers to listen for raised voices
- leaving the room if afraid for own safety and notify others
- leaving the room for a break as a diffuser (“One moment please, I have to photocopy something.”)
- not stopping an irate visitor from leaving
- recording all incidents including ‘near misses’ in the incident register
- following up incidents including discuss/analyse/devise controls
- offering debriefing and counselling after an incident
- offering a break from work duties and ride home/taxi/ring a friend to come (don’t drive self)
- providing refresher training in this area

Attending premises out of hours

Ideally, people should never be inside workplace buildings on their own, but we all know it happens. You may be just passing by and think to yourself, “I will just pop in and check on something”. Don’t do it, unless you have told someone. Just take a minute to call someone so that they know where you are and how long you will be there.

If, for instance, you trip and injure yourself whilst in the building, then your contact person can raise the alarm and get help when you don’t appear at the right time.

Working late

If you have to stay back late for any reason, try to make sure that you are not alone. Leave the premises with someone else. Make sure that you all get to your cars or home safely.

If you are leaving on your own at night, call someone before you leave and then call them again when you are safely in your car or at home.

If you have off street parking facilities, make sure that they are well lit at night.

Always lock all doors if you are in a building on your own.

For people who often leave late on their own, think about the way you do things. Is it really necessary for you to stay back late? Is there some other way of doing the job?

If there is no alternative to staying late then consider using a personal alarm that gives out a piercing noise.

Slips, trips and falls

Slips, trips and falls are the most common causes of injury.

Make sure all flooring surfaces are as even as possible, with no obvious raised or sunken parts. Loose floorboards should be fixed and torn carpet taped down until it can be repaired or replaced.

Steps, staircases and ramps should be in good repair. Steps in dark areas can be highlighted by painting the leading edge of the tread with yellow non-slip paint.

When cleaning floors make sure you have the warning signs out until the floor is dry.

With rain, many surfaces become very slippery. Have these areas coated with non-slip paint or provide mats to prevent slipping.

Keep all electrical and computer cords tidy and against walls. If you must have a cable temporarily running across a floor then cover it with a mat or tape down with hazard tape to prevent tripping.

Keep all floors, corridors, doorways and stairs free from any obstacles.

More people fall from ladders than anything else. Only use small stepladders, preferably with deep treads and handrails. Ideally, your feet should not be higher than one metre from the floor. To use larger ladders you need to be trained in the correct use of ladders.

Do not store large or heavy items that require two hands to move, up high. Always try to have one hand on the ladder itself.

Having someone hold the bottom of the ladder is good for keeping taller ladders stable, but not for catching people if they fall. If you fall on top of the person at the bottom of the ladder then both of you could be severely injured.

Electrical safety

Electrical safety is important on two major fronts - fire and electrocution.

Wherever possible, safety switches should be installed to prevent possible electrocution and the risk of fire.

All electrical appliances should be checked every six months to ensure that they are in good condition, with no damage to cords, plugs or cases. If they are damaged in any way then they should be repaired by qualified tradesmen or thrown away. Any appliances that are brought in by volunteers—for whatever reason, such as to keep their feet warm in draughty old buildings—should be checked before use. If you can afford it, testing and tagging is another option.

With appliances, if you have any doubt, throw it out!

Don't use double adaptors. Power boards are fine provided they are not overloaded or daisy chained together.

Keep all electrical cords tidy to avoid trips.

With antique or legacy electrical items such as old radios, etc., it is particularly important to have them checked before use.

Lifting and handling

If it's too heavy, don't lift it!

Lifting just one corner of an object will give you some idea of its total weight. If it's too heavy, get help before attempting to lift it.

Use lifting aids such as trolleys wherever possible. There are many different types of trolleys, including ones for lifting chairs and tables.

When receiving deliveries of heavier items, have the delivery person put the items exactly where you want them. This cuts down on the amount of lifting you have to do.

Think of ways to avoid heavy lifting, e.g. for office paper, don't lift the whole box; instead, open it and remove as much paper as you need at the time.

When lifting, try to bend your knees, keep your back in its natural curve and don't twist or turn as you lift. Hold the items close to your body as you lift, not at arm's length.

Heavy items should be stored at about waist height for ease of lifting. If things are too high you may have trouble holding on to a heavy object. You could injure yourself or others when the object falls. You could become the falling object if you are unstable on a ladder. If things are too low then this puts extra strain on your back, legs and arms.

Make sure that all bookcases and storage shelving are properly secured to the walls. Only store light, rarely used items on top shelves.

Do not stack chairs more than five high.

Chemicals and dangerous goods

If you have any chemicals or dangerous goods on your premises then you need to ensure that the correct precautions are taken.

All chemicals and dangerous goods such as petrol should be locked up when not in use. Under no circumstances should members of the public, especially children, be allowed access to these substances.

All cleaning products should be considered as chemicals. Material safety data sheets can and should be obtained for each chemical held in storage. These sheets give safe handling guidelines and information on what to do in case of poisoning or skin contact, etc.

Ensure that people are made aware of any associated dangers before they are allowed to use chemicals.

Wear suitable protective equipment when using potentially harmful chemicals.

Bullying

Bullying is everywhere, even within the ranks of volunteers. Bullying is a very serious problem and needs to be addressed by all organisations.

Each organisation needs an anti-bullying policy.

The Worksafe Victoria website contains material on workplace bullying including *Preventing and responding to bullying at work*.⁴

⁴ <http://tinyurl.com/23u9mm4>

Managing Incidents

What is an incident?

An incident is any unplanned event resulting in, or having a potential for, injury, illness, death, damage or other loss. Incidents include 'near misses'. A near miss is an incident that does not result in personal injury but has the potential to cause injury and/or property damage; for example, the collapse of a shelf which injured nobody.

What are some likely incidents?

It is unlikely that we will experience many incidents in our workplaces but some examples of incidents that may occur include:

- sprain/strain – from sitting at the computer in an awkward posture for too long or from lifting a heavy box into a car
- cuts or lacerations – from sharp edges, opening boxes
- burns – from hot drinks
- bruises – from bumping into things or tripping over something on the floor
- general illness – someone feeling unwell or dizzy

How to manage incidents

If there is an incident at work, you need to take the following steps:

Make the area safe and get help

1. Safety – is the area safe?
2. Seek Medical Attention if required
3. Emergency – call 000 if required

Report the incident

Report the incident, injury or illness to your committee of management.

Investigate the incident

1. Work out who was involved
2. Think about what happened and why
3. Ask lots of questions
4. Find the hazard
5. Think about the hazard
6. Fix the hazard

Record-keeping

It is important to complete the Incident-Injury Register for all incidents, including near misses.

An example of an incident-injury register is included in the *Procedures* section of the Guide under *Forms*. If you do not already maintain such a register, implement this process as soon as possible.

Keeping records of incidents or injuries is important to build up information on particular hazards and then to put in place strategies to reduce the hazard.

Traumatic events

Traumatic events could require professional counselling for the people involved. It is important that this counselling take place as soon as possible. People involved in traumatic events should be monitored for shock and any unusual behaviour. Look after each other when incidents occur.