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Turning your safety culture around.
Companies must summon the bravery to challenge existing safety paradigms and build positive cultures, writes Kim Flanagan

Law
There are three steps organisations need to take to assist with work health and safety due diligence compliance, writes Michael Tooma

Technology
There have been a number of important developments in the OHS technology and solutions space of late, writes Craig Donaldson

Event review
A number of issues associated with SWMS were recently discussed at the 11th SIA OHS Construction Forum, writes Gloria Kyriacou Morosinotto
from the editor

Safety’s mission: onwards and upwards

A role in OHS is an undertaking in a journey of continuous improvement. OHS professionals are in a key position to help effect change within organisations – and perhaps more so than any other role from a real and meaningful perspective.

Building and maintaining an intrinsically strong safety culture is something that many organisations struggle with. Culture is ultimately driven from the top, and it is actions that speak louder than words when it comes to what is seen as acceptable (and what is not acceptable) around unsafe behaviour and actions. In this issue (page 14), NBNCo’s Kim Flanagan explores the concept of “cowered dog syndrome” – in which a dog reacts to a negative action from its owner with a negative reaction by cowering. Similarly, a negative action from a company will be met with a negative response from an employee. However, people respond in a positive environment, and Flanagan argues that only a brave company will challenge existing safety paradigms and take the steps necessary to break the self-perpetuating cycle of a negative culture.

Similarly, Gerry Schumann, NASA’s institutional safety program manager (cover story, page 20) says that it is leaders who create culture – and it is also their job to change it. While Schumann acknowledges that the agency has experienced disaster, he explains how it has also learned important lessons that have contributed to improved systems, processes, procedures and practices.

Also in this issue (page 32), the SIA’s building and construction industry champion, Gloria Kyriacou Morosinotto, discusses key points that came out of the most recent SIA OHS Construction Forum. She explains that safe work method statements (SWMS) have become unworkable and unable to be understood by workers, and says it was unanimously agreed at the forum that the current standard of SWMS in the construction industry is not acceptable and they are no longer helping achieve the objective of managing health and safety risks in a simple, inclusive and practical manner.

New winds of change are also blowing at the Safety Institute of Australia, with the recent election of a new Board. Sue Pilkington, former Board Chair and then interim CEO, deserves recognition and thanks for the tireless work she put into both roles and in helping shape the future of the institute and the safety profession.

A new Board was also elected at the recent Annual General Meeting, so welcome to new and returning Board members: Amanda Benson, Sue Bottrell, PJ Fleming, Bryce McLaren, Tony Mitchell, Cameron Montgomery, Patrick Murphy, Dr Angelica Vecchio-Sadus and Nathan Winter. Acknowledgement and thanks should also be given to outgoing Directors who served on the Board of 2012/2013: Malcolm Burgin, John Everett, Roger Fairfax, Sue Pilkington, John Kirwan, Maggie Thomas, Stephen Thomas and Adam Mroz.

The fact that 25 candidates stood for election as a Director this year demonstrates an unprecedented level of interest in the management of the profession and the institute which augurs well its future.

OHS Professional’s editorial board

Craig Donaldson, editor, OHS Professional
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Improving mental health in the workplace

Australians should stop and think about the impact mental health can have on workers and work health and safety, according to Safe Work Australia CEO, Rex Hoy. “It is easy to think of work health and safety as a purely physical issue when in reality mental stress is a serious problem for many workers, their families, friends and employers,” said Hoy. “Help fellow workers reduce stress levels by encouraging them to take regular breaks from work or participate in workplace activities during safety month.” Work-related mental stress workers’ compensation claims are the most expensive form of workers’ compensation claim because they usually involve lengthy periods of absence.

Setback for oral fluid workplace drug testing

Employers may need to reconsider their type of workplace drug testing regime as a result of a decision by the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) to withdraw accreditation for onsite drug testing of oral fluid, according to an international law firm. In a recent employment alert, Ashurst noted that the decision by NATA will likely be a factor in future Fair Work Commission decisions on workplace drug testing procedures. If organisations use on-site oral fluid drug testing, Ashurst recommended they consider the reliability of the method, and whether the agreement, procedure or policy setting out the testing method prescribes that testing must be conducted by a NATA accredited testing agency.

3 steps to creating a culture of safety citizenship

There are three critical steps to building a culture of safety citizenship within organisations, according to Tristan Casey, research analyst with global safety consulting firm Sentis. Speaking at the SIA Visions Conference 2013, which was held from 8 to 11 October at the Pullman Cairns International, Casey said the three critical components are: encouraging positive social experiences between leaders and employees; encouraging specific types of safety behaviours and shared ways of thinking about safety; and facilitating opportunities for employees to adopt additional responsibilities and exert shared ownership over safety.

Safety tops oil and gas risk agenda

Health, safety and environment (HSE) and regulatory compliance are the top risk concerns for the oil and gas industries, according to a recent report. “The oil and gas industry is undergoing an intense focus on safety and environmental risk preparedness and mitigation,” said Dale Nijoka, global oil & gas leader for Ernst & Young, which conducted the report, Business Pulse: Exploring the dual perspectives of the top 10 risks and opportunities in 2013 and beyond. “In light of corporate social responsibilities, economic challenges and regulatory pressures, it has become increasingly clear that managing these risks is vital for long-term sustainability.”

How to manage emergency services WHS

Balancing community expectations with work, health and safety (WHS) compliance is one of the most significant challenges facing the ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA), according to its Commissioner, Dominic Lane. “The community has an expectation that any response will be timely and effective,” said Lane of the ESA, which oversees the territory’s ambulance, fire and rescue, SES and rural fire service operations. Speaking at a recent SIA ACT Branch Committee event, Lane said each of the discrete operational services within ESA has core legislated responsibilities and a domain of operation. “ESA must adopt a holistic approach to WHS management that recognises the differences between the services,” he said.

Warning issued over mining fatalities and injuries

A study into fatalities within Western Australia’s resources sector has found that 49 per cent of deaths involved workers who were in the first year at their respective mine sites or fulfilling new roles. As a result, Western Australia’s chief resources safety regulator stressed the importance of inductions, training and familiarisation with new environments. “We believe high staff turnover can also further influence the number of accidents in the first year of a new role,” said the state’s Department of Mines and Petroleum (DMP) Resources Safety executive director Simon Ridge. The study, which analysed 52 mining deaths that occurred from 2000 to 2012, a time period that saw the industry’s workforce increase by 60,000 across the state, also found 62 per cent of the cases involved on-site procedures not being complied with.
I had been vice president SIA WA and then president of the committee for SIA WA when we had a small disruption caused by some people who desired for an independent safety institute in WA, and they consequently formed a breakaway group which caused much confusion for our local members.

I went on and reformed a committee to continue to promote safety in WA through the SIA. I saw an inspired effort from that first committee, many of whom are still in those roles today, and we went on to establish an even stronger branch than before. I measure this success by the continued membership growth, which in a few short years has more than doubled. History shows that WA membership growth has regularly outstripped that of the eastern states. There’s always some friendly rivalry between states.

The other big change was the SIA’s move from an incorporated association to become a company limited by guarantee. That created a different role for state committees and brought about a much more business-like approach to running the branch. The transition here in WA was smooth and pretty seamless, with the committee warming to their new roles while continuing to deal with local matters in driving the WA Branch’s growing success. This strong effort created successful safety conferences, Sundowners, safety breakfasts and specialised training workshops.

From my point of view it has been my honour over the past five years to lead the charge, so to speak, and I can move on knowing that the SIA WA Branch is growing stronger each year and that the committee, led ably by Michael Walsh, will continue this good work.

The branch has established regular safety themed breakfasts and specialised safety workshops, and provides a forum for safety professionals and other people and groups interested in safety to share ideas, learn and socialise. I have been impressed by the professionalism shown by committee members over the years and I know their efforts will continue to promote safety throughout WA.

“I measure this success by the continued membership growth, which in a few short years has more than doubled”
Challenging the OHS norm

OHS Professional magazine’s editorial board examines the greatest achievements as well as the biggest challenges facing the OHS profession

What are the greatest achievements of the OHS profession?
The greatest achievement of the Australian OHS profession has been in making safety a “boardroom issue”. This has been achieved in part through regulatory reforms which, since the early 1980s, have made directors and senior managers personally liable for safety offences. In part, this has been achieved through influencing management to lead in safety.

What are the greatest challenges facing the OHS profession?
The greatest challenge of OHS professionals is complacency. There has been very little thought leadership in safety in recent years. We all use the same incident investigation techniques. We all cost safety in the same way. We all preach the same leadership mantra. There has been very little done by way of rethinking safety. True innovation is rare. Yet we still kill too many people at work. We need to challenge ourselves to innovate, and to engage in genuine debates about ideas for safety improvements.

Michael Tooma
Michael Tooma is a partner and head of OHS and security (Asia Pacific), Norton Rose Fulbright Australia

Angelica Vecchio-Sadus
Angelica Vecchio-Sadus is HSE leader, CSIRO Process Science and Engineering

The greatest achievement of the Australian OHS profession has been in making safety a “boardroom issue”

What are the greatest achievements of the OHS profession?
OHS has gained recognition as a professional practice in itself. The OHS professional has evolved from the “safety police” to just enforce rules and regulations, to that of a “safety coach”. Initially, safety officers provided information on compliance. They operated with minimal interaction with other safety officers and had little in the way of professional training.

With time, the role became professionalised with training and qualifications and the creation of teams of safety officers, particularly in larger organisations. Since 2000, the changing regulatory and business landscape has turned the spotlight onto the manager leading safety with the OHS professional to support them. The ability of the OHS professional to extend leadership into the organisation has been pivotal in driving positive and sustainable compliance, reducing risk, influencing management and changing culture. Being a great coach is about bringing out the best in people – catching people doing the right thing!

What are the greatest challenges facing the OHS profession?
The modern and evolving business environment has led to a greater focus on compliance, ethics, community expectations and sustainability. As organisations change they must learn how to leverage your position, knowledge, skills and experience in new ways, and to transition from a technical expert to a business partner. The OHS professional can partner with business leaders to build expectations and key processes and can gain a rightful place at the executive table and a say in business decisions.

An OHS business partner asks what they can do for the business and is involved in activities outside their traditional practice. They learn and integrate a wider range of disciplines such as employee wellbeing, “greening” business practices and business continuity. “Risk” is the language of business. An OHS business partner evaluates risk in the context of the overall business process, including HR and finance. In the eyes of executive management, the use of appropriate accounting, measurement, and process improvement tools will create tangible and intangible value. The OHS business partner must be able to transform their communication from a technical focus to a business value – the positive impact of OHS on employee wellbeing, innovation, compliance risk, company reputation, quality and productivity.

Future success is going to demand increased proficiency and know-how. To be a successful OHS business partner may require a new way of thinking and operating as a:
• Strategic thinker: integrate and align OHS with overall business objectives
• Leader: trusted adviser, well networked, build and maintain relationships
• Change agent: actively engage the “hearts and minds” of managers and workers for continuous improvement
• Coach and educator: guide leaders, develop talent
• Progress driver: analyse data and metrics, develop methods that demonstrate OHS performance in a financial framework.
Andrew Douglas
Andrew Douglas is a principal in the workplace relations team at M+K Lawyers

What are the greatest achievements of the OHS profession?
OHS in Australia has achieved remarkable things over the last 10 years. Many of those changes have arisen as a result of the advocacy of the Safety Institute of Australia (SIA). The three significant achievements over the last 10 years are as follows.

1. The understanding that compliance-driven safety does not create a safe environment and that wellbeing-driven processes achieved improved compliance, better safety outcomes and better financial outcomes for business.

2. The courage of the SIA to develop a body of knowledge which will shape the future education of safety practitioners (creating standardisation and reliability) and permit consumers of safety to know what they are buying.

3. The aligning of human resources, safety and workers’ compensation as internal resources to operations, delivering an integrated early intervention process that prevents people from developing illness and injury, reduces the length and seriousness of injuries, returns people rapidly to work in meaningful work, improves productivity of business and develops a culture of caring and welfare consistent with the new drivers of wellbeing.

These three achievements are all in their infancy. Together they provide a powerful force for change in our workplaces, which brings recognition to the operational paths of business that health and safety is a significant driver in culture, profit and quality.

The maturing of these three elements into a coherent system, adopted by all business, is our aspiration. The movement away from clichéd and unrealistic goals like zero harm, into a world that focuses on individual employee welfare, means we will create businesses where people want to work, feel safe working, feel valued and, as a result, are more productive and focused in delivering the outcome which is most desirable for that business. Safety has been a huge catalyst for social responsibility (under new WHS laws and the discussions that flowed from that), business sustainability and innovation.

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Are LASERS used at your workplace?

The changing regulatory and business landscape has turned the spotlight onto the manager leading safety with the OHS professional to support them”

What are the greatest challenges facing the OHS profession?
Perhaps one of the saddest aspects of the past 10 years has been the failure of many people to recognise and appreciate the impact these innovations in safety have had in our business life. I have felt fortunate to be involved in assisting this magazine, the SIA, VIOSH and my clients in to raise awareness around the importance of these three drivers in a hope that my and others’ advocacy can mature the growth and development of health and safety in Australian businesses further.
steps for WHS due diligence compliance

There are three steps organisations need to take to assist their officers in complying with their work health and safety due diligence duties, writes Michael Tooma

Under work health and safety (WHS) laws, officers are required to exercise “due diligence” to ensure that their organisation is complying with its obligations under the laws. Due diligence is defined under the laws and includes six specific elements.

The due diligence obligation is a personal duty imposed on officers, who are required to take both personal and proactive steps to demonstrate compliance with the duty. However, officers will to some extent rely on their organisation to have certain systems and processes in place so that they can comply with the due diligence obligation.

Due diligence compliance

There are three steps organisations need to take to assist their officers in complying with their duties.

1. Establish a due diligence framework and safety management system. Organisations need to have a corporate governance framework in place which sets out how officers will comply with their due diligence obligations, and organisational systems and processes in place to assist officers in meeting their duties. Organisations should also ensure that they have a legally compliant documented safety management system in place in order to comply with their obligations under WHS laws.

2. Establish a safety performance reporting framework. One of the specific elements of the due diligence obligation requires officers to consider incidents, hazards and risks. In order to enable officers to comply with that requirement, organisations need to have a robust safety performance reporting framework in place (including performance reporting tools) to collect and assess information around incidents, hazards and risks and provide regular WHS performance reports to officers on that information. Organisations also need to have an effective corporate governance structure and committees in place to enable a flow through of information so that it is considered at the right levels.

3. Conduct regular legal compliance audits. One of the most critical aspects of the due diligence obligation is the requirement for officers to ensure legal compliance by their respective organisation. Organisations should have in place a comprehensive safety auditing program and undertake legal compliance of their safety management system and performance on an annual basis. Audits should be externally conducted at least every second year.

Compliance pitfalls

There are a number of important things for organisations and officers to keep in mind in relation to the due diligence obligation. In particular, they should remember the due diligence obligation is a personal and proactive duty. While officers can rely on systems and processes in place within their organisation, they need to personally verify for themselves that those systems are in place in order to exercise due diligence.

In addition to relying on organisational systems and processes, officers also need to personally and actively engage with safety issues on a regular basis to exercise due diligence. A good way for officers to do this is to conduct regular safety “conversations” with their workers. These are informal discussions held with workers about safety. Officers can use these safety conversations as also an opportunity to learn about safety issues faced by their workers on the ground. These conversations also present officers with an opportunity to demonstrate safety leadership and commitment to their workforce, and reinforce important safety messages.

It is also important to collect the right information. In order that officers can be
provided with the right reporting material, organisations need to ensure that performance reporting systems have been designed to collect and assess the right information. Organisations should use a combination of ‘lag’ (negative) and ‘lead’ positive indicators, which are linked to the organisation’s undertaking and in particular, critical risks.

It is not enough for officers to merely receive information and reports about safety. Often organisations have excellent safety performance reporting systems and auditing programs. However, these processes will be useless to the organisation and its officers if the information generated from these processes is never acted on when required. The due diligence obligation specifically requires that officers not only receive information about incidents, hazards and risks, but that they interrogate and respond to that information in a timely way. Where particular issues come to light in WHS performance reports, for example, officers need to act on that information by providing additional resources or seeking out further information from particular workers to resolve the issue.

Similarly, it is not enough for officers to be informed that legal compliance audits have been conducted. Officers must ensure legal compliance by their organisation by verifying that non-compliances identified in audits are closed out in timely manner. They should receive reports on the implementation of corrective actions identified in audits until they are all closed out, and take action where corrective actions remain unresolved over a period of time. Officers can also take the opportunity to validate recommended incident investigations following incidents, by testing the recommended controls by considering additional “what if” scenarios.

The role of OHS professionals
There are ways in which OHS professionals can assist with compliance and working with PCBUs to make sure they meet their obligations in a cost- and time-efficient manner. Subscribing to legal updates, for example, can be a great time saver for officers and OHS professionals in keeping up to date with changes in WHS legislation, new case law and emerging WHS issues and risks of interest to the organisation. Organisations should subscribe to a service which is specifically tailored to their organisation’s undertaking and risk profile in order to ensure that they are getting the best value for money in these services.

Another way organisations can look at saving time and money in assisting officers to complying with their WHS obligations is to develop integrated systems and frameworks for due diligence which capture obligations under multiple regulatory regimes. Environmental legislation in Australia, for example, contains a defence of ‘reasonable precaution’ and ‘due diligence’ for breaches of the environmental obligations of organisations, which neatly align to the due diligence requirements under the WHS Act.

Michael Tooma is partner and head of OHS and security (Asia Pacific) for Norton Rose Fulbright Australia, and a member of OHS Professional magazine’s editorial board. Tooma spoke about WHS due diligence for organisations and officers at the recent SIA Visions Conference 2013.

“Officers also need to personally and actively engage with safety issues on a regular basis to exercise due diligence”
Capital punishment has done nothing to reduce murder rates or drug running. There is always someone prepared to take the risk, even though they may not be prepared to accept the consequences of their risk. Similarly, punitive measures and dismissal may have achieved nothing in reducing injury rates or fatalities in industry. In fact, these measures may be driving the safety culture of these industries underground – covert culture. Companies invest heavily in their employees, and to lose a valued employee through a safety indiscretion only seeks to punish the company and the family of the employee.

Companies with safety at the forefront of their operations are constantly striving to go to the next level in safety, but some plateau in their statistics and cannot get to zero injuries. How do companies get to the next level? Have their company safety professionals and consultants been delivering the correct message? It may require a company to challenge their existing safety ideology. But are we brave enough to change the way we think, are we prepared to drop conventional safety programs to try something new?

Overt and covert safety culture

Safety culture is best described by what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviours by employees and management in the daily running of the business.

Every company has its own set of cultures and it is common to have sub-cultures. Fitters may behave differently to electricians who may be different to production operators. Safety culture within an organisation is driven and reinforced by supervisors and management. If supervisors and management do not believe in safety then the shop floor personnel will not believe in safety. There are two types of safety culture – overt safety culture and covert safety culture.

Overt safety culture is determined by the company; it is what behaviour the company expects from its personnel. It is based on the company’s procedures and systems and people learn the processes via training and induction programs. Overt safety culture is usually based on society’s norms and expectations. Companies with good overt safety culture have robust safety systems and procedures, committed supervision and excellent training programs.

Covert culture is learned on the job from what people see around them. It is learned from the actions of other people, supervisors and managers. It is driven by a lack of positive disciplines and reinforced by negative responses of supervisors and managers who do not positively address unacceptable behaviours and conditions. Fear of punishment or dismissal creates covert culture. It is human nature to try and cut work time or take short cuts. Employees do not want to be seen as weak, therefore, in covert cultures they choose to mimic others, thus constantly reinforcing behaviour and the culture. This is the self-perpetuating cycle of covert culture. In covert cultures, important root causes are not addressed or shared to prevent serious injury or fatal incidents.

The iron fist in the velvet glove paradigm

Many companies and consultants that sell OHS systems and cultures believe in what they call “the iron fist in the velvet glove” approach to safety. The “iron fist” is based on the premise of four strikes and you’re out. Four safety indiscretions and the punishment is dismissal; a policy of zero tolerance to a safety breach before
“Punitive measures and dismissal may have achieved nothing in reducing injury rates or fatalities in industry”
the act is committed or investigated. After the first offence a commitment is gained from the employee not to digress again in the future. Catch the person again and a written warning is issued. Another indiscretion and the final warning is issued, then with the fourth indiscretion, dismissal. Some safety professionals and managers state it sends a strong message to other employees – nothing like nailing someone to the cross outside the city walls to show the next person what happens when you upset the Romans.

The use of dismissal as a safety tool not only punishes the employee but also the family of that employee. It sends the wrong message, not a strong message. The use of punitive measures to enforce safety rules and procedures creates and encourages covert culture within organisations. If a person has had three strikes and has another near miss, are they going to report it? The answer is quite simply “no”; fear of dismissal will ensure the non-reporting of that near miss – the near miss that may contribute to the next fatal incident.

There are companies who extend the iron fist to their management. If a plant manager has one lost time injury (LTI) in a year, that’s okay. But have two LTI and the plant manager is dismissed, transferred or demoted. What message is this sending? If the plant manager has one LTI and has the misfortune of a second, what is he/she going to do? They are going to attempt to hide the LTI or not count the LTI. This only adds to the company’s covert culture and sends a message to employees that covert culture is okay.

Other companies only apply the iron fist to their shop floor employees. This lack of consistency only seeks to drive culture towards the covert. Such companies readily dismiss a shop floor employee but never dismiss a manager for a similar or even worse indiscretion.

The “velvet glove” on the other hand (excuse the pun) is where one encourages safe behaviour by the use of reward schemes, regular auditing and congratulations to employees, and of course along the way, we find fault and use the iron fist. Confusing isn’t it? It sends mixed messages and also creates mistrust of management, who on one hand are punishing and on the other rewarding. Consistency and positivity is a great leadership and management trait.

It is impossible for a company that uses the iron fist in the velvet glove approach to reach the desired OHS culture, and that company will tend to plateau statistically or have very few LTI but still have fatal incidents. The OHS culture is very much covert.

Cowered dog syndrome
We have all heard the old adage “spare the rod and spoil the child”. Well, here is a new one: “use the rod and cower the dog”. You do not teach dogs new tricks through punishment; you do it with loads of affection and reward. Fear of punishment will see a dog cowering in the same way as fear of punishment creates covert OHS culture. A dog is reacting to a negative action from its owner with a negative reaction by cowering; a negative response to a negative action. Likewise, a negative action from a company will be met with a negative response from the employee.

It is human nature to fight negativity with negativity, which in turn creates a negative worksite. Negative worksites produce dull and boring products as there can be no sense of achievement or accomplishment at the end of the day.

Like dogs, people thrive in a positive environment, one where there is positive thought, positive reinforcement, where people are rewarded for their accomplishments in the form of good remuneration. Dismissal and punishment allows covert culture to thrive within an organisation and our people become like covered dogs.

Overcoming cowered dog syndrome
Firstly, an organisation must turn the negative workplace into a positive workplace. This cannot be achieved overnight, but a good place to start is with a workplace safety agreement. The agreement must clearly set out the following:
• safety rules and expectations
• there will be no dismissal for any reported safety-related indiscretion
• employees will report all incidents and near misses
• employees will participate in the investigation process
• no person will be disciplined for any report of an incident or near miss.

Gain agreement with employee representatives and then clearly articulate the agreement to all in the workplace. Ensure that everyone understands how it will be in the future and that there will be no deviations from the agreement. Have the CEO of the company and the union leader sign off on the agreement first, then have all employees sign the agreement.

Sound investigation and root cause analysis is the key to ensuring a change of culture. Employee involvement is essential. Investigation must be positive and be looking for fact, not blame. At no time during the investigation is blame to be placed on any employee who was part of the incident. It is important that at all times a person’s self-esteem is maintained. If the investigation reveals that an indiscretion or safety violation has occurred, then allow the employee to be contrite and gain their commitment that this incident will never occur again in the future. In other words, people see the error of their way and understand that they may have seriously injured themselves and hurt their family. Again, the self-esteem of the employee must be maintained at all times. It is to be remembered that once the root cause is understood, act on the root cause not the person.

It is very important that all employees...
The utopian safety culture

see that the company is serious about fixing anything to do with poor safety. The company must be prepared to invest in the fixes, revise policy and procedure and train employees.

When auditing, supervision and management must positively reinforce safety rules and ensure people are complimented for doing their job safely. Reward people with good remuneration. Do not use large reward and recognition programs as this becomes an expectation and drives the wrong behaviour. A simple “thank you” is usually great reward for good safety behaviour. If a violation or indiscretion is found then the investigation process must be immediately adopted. Again, it is about finding the root causes of the violation, not placing immediate blame on the individual. What system failed to allow the indiscretion to occur?

Training and induction of new employees is essential. Education of the new employee in the overt culture of the company is extremely important. Articulating the company’s expectations, safety rules, policies and procedures is imperative. All new employees must end the induction by signing the workplace safety agreement.

A company who embarks on this paradigm can expect that their safety performance will remain on a plateau or in fact may get worse as the safety culture moves from covert to overt. More reporting will result in more recording, and with increased investigation and removal of root causes, the injury rate should improve after one to two years.

Dealing with serial offenders
What happens with the serial offender? Serial offending is rare when people are constantly required to take time out to investigate indiscretions; quite simply, people get tired of interruption to their daily schedules. If a person is serial offending, the company must also gain buy in from the employee’s representatives to assist the person in not reoffending.

If the person continues to reoffend then the company must question if the person is in the right job; do they need to be redeployed or simply do they have the capacity to understand the rules? For example, if a company has an electrician who is constantly breaching lockout, then one has to ask if that person is suited to being an electrician or examine if they should be redeployed. However this must still be a part of the participative and consultative processes of the company. The employee must agree that the outcome is best for them.

However, there comes a point when all avenues have been exhausted, when the company must ask themselves whether the person is right for the industry. This is the time when outsourcing the employee to another job or company that suits their capacity to understand and obey rules, must be considered as an option.

Conclusion
This article is not about people who conduct wilful acts, flagrant breaches of the law or bullying. However, dismissal and punitive measures for safety indiscretions do nothing to reduce injuries in the workplace. Fear of punishment drives covert culture and sets the cycle for “cowered dog syndrome”.

People respond in a positive environment and thrive when the culture becomes or is overt. Reporting becomes second nature and investigation is a fact-finding mission, not a process of finding blame. Safety programs drive the safety statistics: there is less pressure on management to deliver good results. Safety disputation and loss of production are greatly reduced.

Only a very brave company will embark on a completely opposite ideology that may send their injury rates backward for a while. Are companies and consultants prepared to take the plunge and break the self-perpetuating cycle of covert culture? Only time will tell.

Kim Flanagan is general manager of health, safety & environment, NBNCo, and a member of OHS Professional magazine’s editorial board. Flanagan wrote this article when he served in a previous role as corporate manager – health, safety & risk at Ford Motor Company.

Any thoughts or feedback? Please email the editor at 3reelance@gmail.com.
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“From those tragic events the agency has learned lessons that have contributed to improved systems, processes, procedures and practices”
When it comes to managing OHS, few environments are as challenging as those faced by NASA. Craig Donaldson explores the OHS challenges faced by the agency and examines how it manages safety risks.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is the agency of the United States Government that is responsible for the nation’s civilian space program and for aeronautics and aerospace research. Established in 1958, partially in response to the Soviet Union’s launch of the first artificial satellite the previous year, the agency is focused on peaceful applications in space science.

Today, with about 18,100 workers and an annual operating budget of about US$17.8 billion, NASA conducts its work in four principal organisations, called mission directorates:

1. Aeronautics: manages research focused on meeting global demand for air mobility in ways that are more environmentally friendly and sustainable, while also embracing revolutionary technology from outside aviation.

2. Human exploration and operations: focuses on International Space Station operations, development of commercial spaceflight capabilities and human exploration beyond low-Earth orbit.

3. Science: explores the Earth, solar system and universe beyond; charts the best route of discovery; and reaps the benefits of Earth and space exploration for society.

4. Space technology: rapidly develops, innovates, demonstrates, and infuses revolutionary, high-payoff technologies that enable NASA’s future missions while providing economic benefit to the nation.

Safety at NASA

Gerry Schumann, NASA’s institutional safety program manager, says that the agency is committed to protecting the health and safety of its workers and is considered a leader in managing
hazards and risks of complex engineered systems and operations. “To be sure, NASA has experienced disaster,” he says, “but from those tragic events the agency has learned lessons that have contributed to improved systems, processes, procedures and practices.”

In many respects, Schumann says NASA is much like most other organisations that conduct hazardous operations. “We manage risks and limit exposure to individuals, whether those individuals are astronauts, employees, contractors or members of the public.” NASA employs hazard and risk analysis of all operations, and through a robust sequence of engineering review and analysis, determines the appropriate levels of protection, he says.

“Like other government agencies, we face budget concerns. It is difficult for mission planners, researchers and facility managers to constantly adjust to varying and mostly declining budgets,” he says. “Centre and mission directors in particular need to ensure safety and health remain top priorities despite limited resources.”

Another concern for NASA and many other agencies that “grew up” during the latter half of the 20th century is ageing infrastructure. Many facilities are at or near their useful life, so issues of safety and health occur. “Sound management and engineering principles must be utilised to ensure successful operation and protection of personnel,” says Schumann.

“Where new technologies spring forth within older surroundings, complex systems can evolve and change faster than the safety controls and barriers intended to protect humans and flight hardware. To avoid this problem, engineers seek configuration control, not only to construct the hardware but maintain related ground support equipment via extensive procedures.”

NASA also faces a demographic challenge. With the end of the Space Shuttle Program, an exodus of talented individuals has occurred. The average NASA employee is more than 47 years old, and by 2019, nearly 45 per cent of the NASA workforce and 55 per cent of the NASA safety and mission assurance workforce will be retirement eligible.

**International Space Station safety**

“Our most obviously unique OHS challenge is protecting the International Space Station and its crew, 250 miles from Earth in a microgravity environment.”

To achieve safety and maintain health, NASA has thousands of policy requirements, according to Schumann – each representing a lesson learned in over five decades of challenging safety risk balanced against cost, schedule, mission, technical and other risks. “This legacy of lessons forms a powerful tool to conquer the unknowns of future missions,” he says.

All NASA centres, facilities, programs and projects are keenly involved in safety and mission success and undergo rigorous review of safety and health procedures. This includes using design philosophies to eliminate hazards, engineering controls to limit exposure, developing processes and procedures for successful operations and using personal protective equipment to protect individuals.
NASA’s governance and strategic management structure is intentionally lean, according to Schumann. It is executed through three councils: the strategic management council, the operations management council and the program management council. “These councils are intended to enable efficient decision making and to promote effective communication between and among the various NASA elements,” says Schumann.

The office of safety and mission assurance and the office of the chief health and medical officer report directly to the NASA administrator, and manage and implement the safety and health requirements for the agency as established through federal law and agency directives.

**OHS in policy**

NASA core values include:

**Safety:** NASA’s constant attention to safety is the cornerstone of mission success. NASA is committed, individually and as a team, to protecting the safety and health of the public, our team members, and those assets entrusted to the Agency by the nation.

**Integrity:** NASA is committed to maintaining an environment of trust, honesty, ethical behaviour, respect and candour. NASA leaders encourage this environment by encouraging and rewarding a vigorous, open flow of communication on all issues, in all directions, among all employees. NASA encourages dialogue without fear of reprisal.

**Teamwork:** NASA’s approach to teamwork is based on a philosophy that each team member brings unique experience and expertise to project issues.
**Excellence**: NASA is committed to nurturing an organisational culture in which individuals make full use of their time, talent and opportunities to pursue excellence in both the ordinary and the extraordinary. “Within the safety and mission assurance community, these core values are embedded in our processes and procedures,” says Schumann.

**OHS in practice**

NASA’s administrator, Charles Bolden, Jr, a retired United States Marine Corps Major General and former NASA astronaut, is ultimately responsible for safety. The administrator sets the tone or climate for safety and health, according to Schumann, who explains that centre and mission directors, who report to the administrator, are responsible for how established policy is implemented in programs and centres.

Program and project managers, supervisors and employees are actively involved in all aspects of safety and health in daily activities, from complex hazardous operations to the more benign office functions, he says. “OHS professionals assist in the development of job hazards analyses to determine controls for eliminating or limiting exposure to hazards,” he says.

**Building a safety culture**

NASA also has a safety culture program. Manager Tracy Dillinger built the program with input from a safety culture working group with members from each centre and work location, along with consideration of safety professionals’ concepts such as the work of James Reason. The working group uses a model with five safety culture factors:

- **Reporting culture**: We report our concerns
- **Just culture**: We treat each other fairly
- **Flexible culture**: We change to meet new demands
- **Learning culture**: We learn from successes and mistakes
- **Engaged culture**: Everyone does their part

NASA continually assesses its safety culture on a three-year cycle via a survey that gauges how management and employees carry out their daily activities. “This year we also started organisational safety assessments (OSAs),” Dillinger says. Performed by request, OSAs take a comprehensive look at the organisation from a safety perspective, including history, metrics, mission, interviews, focus groups and behavioral observations. The assessments culminate in a briefing to the source of the request, with findings and recommendations.

“NASA leadership, beginning with the administrator, regularly emphasises the importance of safety culture in messages to employees,” says Dillinger. “We have developed computer-based courses for employees and supervisors on safety culture, and we distribute checklists, brochures and posters agency-wide.” The goal of the program is to create and sustain a healthy safety culture at NASA via assessment, education and engagement.

**Benchmarking OHS**

NASA uses a number of lead and lag indicators to measure performance in the safety and health arena. As a federal agency of the Executive Branch of the United States, NASA follows Presidential initiatives. Currently, NASA is implementing the President’s POWER initiative. POWER stands for protecting our workers and ensuring re-employment.

Under the POWER initiative, each executive department and agency will be expected to improve its performance in seven areas:

- Reducing total injury and illness case rates
- Reducing lost time injury and illness case rates
- Analysing lost time injury and illness data
- Increasing the timely filing of workers’ compensation claims
- Increasing the timely filing of wage-loss claims
- Reducing lost production day rates
- Speeding employees’ return to work in cases of serious injury or illness.

NASA’s case rate for occupational injury and illness is low compared to other US federal agencies, including those engaging in similar types of work. “Mishap rates are also declining for our contract employees, who perform a lot of the processing of spaceflight hardware, facility and aircraft operation and a host of other functions,” says Schumann.

**Managing OHS challenges**

In 1996, sociologist Dr Diane Vaughan described a behaviour called the “normalisation of deviance” that contributed to the flawed decision to launch the Space Shuttle Challenger following freezing weather. In this behaviour, incremental acceptance of increasing risk, deviating from design intent, was supported by the perception of the Orbiter and its launch vehicles as an operational system instead of an experimental system.

Years later, the Space Shuttle Columbia Accident Investigation Board (CAIB) report identified a number of factors that contributed to the Columbia accident; among them was the return of “normalisation of deviance”.

NASA recognised and responded to this in several ways during its 2005 return to flight and completion of remaining shuttle missions.

“A common thread was a leadership effort to encourage employees to speak up about hazard concerns, and then provide a process to ensure risk owners (including crew) understood the known facts – with the freedom to delay launches until enough was learned to either mitigate risk or accept it,” says Schumann.

“Despite historically low mishap rates in recent years, we must remain vigilant as the next generation of spacecraft takes flight, whether they are built by NASA or for its use by commercial vendors.”
The role of OHS leaders

“Leaders create culture. It is their job to change it.” This quote from the Space Shuttle Columbia Accident Investigation Board (CAIB) report is still valid and relevant today, according to Gerry Schumann, NASA’s institutional safety program manager.

“Safety and health professionals need to speak up when they see that something is wrong or an issue is not getting the attention it deserves. An effective OHS professional should display domain competency, integrity and courage when communicating risk to those exposed and to those with the authority to manage risk,” he says.
In the past 12 months there has been a huge increase in companies looking for an access system solution that can manage visitors, contractors and employees, according to Tim Johnson, managing director, Rapid Global. Apart from compliance and efficiency benefits, the ability to have information such as emergency evacuation lists, safety alerts, breathalysers and key access systems integrated provides enormous benefits, he says.

Johnson says more companies also require often urgent assistance with the management of their contractors. “It is evident that awareness of the new WHS laws has meant more businesses are looking to implement systems that can provide them assurance of contractor compliance,” he says. “These businesses are looking for risk management solutions that will provide a failsafe way to ensure that the contractors that they are using are compliant, their documentation is verified and that the contractor is trained before they start work on-site.”

Paul Hayes, head of sales, EH&S, SAI Global Compliance, also says mobility is a key trend, as companies seek to improve the effectiveness of and engagement with OHS management processes. “Filling out paper forms on return to the office (days or weeks later) is no longer considered reliable or timely enough,” he says. “Instead, clients are asking to capture data in the field, no matter how remote, to help them be proactive in managing OHS.”

Another interesting trend is the demand for a single platform that can support the needs of multiple interrelated business processes. Hayes believes this is being driven by organisations looking more holistically at corporate sustainability. “Beyond OHS, we are also seeing demand for integrated modules such as contractor management, document management and stakeholder management, to name a few,” he says.

Paul Coakley, managing director, Stems Solutions, says another significant trend is around environmental management and reporting as well as risk management. While these have been around for a long time, he says expectations and demands have increased in the past couple of years. “The overarching trend that really stands out – and which is very positive – is that safety professionals are focusing more on lead indicators as opposed to lag indicators. While both have an important role, traditionally software in this sector has focused on the lag indicators, for obvious reasons, basically due to reporting requirements,” says Coakley.

**Trend drivers**

A combination of factors is driving the above trends, according to Hayes. Regulatory requirements are becoming more stringent, and he notes that high expectations are placed upon organisations to be transparent and highly responsive to significant events. “Community expectations are also high, and failure to meet these in a timely manner can impact an organisation’s reputation and licence to operate,” he says. “As a consequence, mobile devices are becoming an essential frontline tool for the capture, reporting and response to events in real-time.”

Similarly, he says advances in technology and high smart device uptake rates have undoubtedly encouraged the development of mobility solutions. “When combined with management expectations for real-time data, the accuracy of reported information
becomes critical,” says Hayes, who notes that having a single, integrated platform simplifies traditionally complex cross-functional reporting.

“Beyond the obvious benefits of drawing from a single source of data, integrated platforms enable complex relationships between records to be established, which can help to identify trends. End users also benefit from using a single, familiar user interface,” he says.

Johnson says another key driver relates to the need for organisations to lower costs and become more efficient. “In some cases this is forced upon the organisation where labour cost cutting measures have already taken place,” he says. “During tough economic times overheads in human resources and WHS are reduced to levels whereby finding better and more efficient ways to manage the workload and business processes is essential.”

Software as an operational asset is now a widely accepted concept, and as a result, Johnson has observed that management can question the reasoning behind having multiple standalone systems and instead demand software systems that fulfill more than one function. “Where companies would have previously been satisfied with just a simple online induction system, they are now relying on our expertise in managing the full contractor lifecycle from supplier registration through to on site access control and even online work permit issuing,” he says.

“It is evident that awareness of the new WHS laws has meant more businesses are looking to implement systems that can provide them assurance of contractor compliance”

1 Requirements. When looking for software solutions, first list your requirements, which should be “needs”, then “nice to have”. With that list of requirements, then look for products and services that best match those requirements. A very common mistake most businesses make when looking for a product is they do not make these preparations, and so they can easily lose focus of their original objectives and then “get lost” in the sea of options that are out there in the market place now, and ultimately end up risking investing into a product & service that does not meet their needs.

2 Costs and services. The next step would be that, while listing your requirements in relation to capabilities of the product is very important, there is another layer of factors that must be considered. This is the service from that provider, what other costs are involved, support processes and costs (tech and user), their business model, and so on. Too often businesses focus completely on the software, or are even easily impressed by the sales team. Another mistake that can be made is purely basing decisions on the assumption that “if that company uses it, then we should”. There are also often hidden costs, so while the purchase or lease may seem very competitive, make sure all ongoing costs have been considered too, such as support, updates, upgrades, modules and so on.

3 Management needs to plan for the application. Many facets need to be addressed with this step, such as the accountable roles that need to look after the quality of data entry, managing changes that may be required, whether those changes are required to be made by the client through the user interface customisation options, or via the service provider, managing user support and expectations, utilisation and even ongoing implementation processes. There are many facets to managing the application, and if not done at least to some degree with good key personnel, it will not matter how good the product is: the objectives of this investment of time and money will fail. A good management plan will also play an important role in achieving a long-term culture of utilisation.

There are three steps organisations should adopt and follow in getting the most out of any OHS management solution, according to Paul Coakley, managing director, Stems Solutions:

3 steps to maximising an OHS solution

1 Requirements.

2 Costs and services.

3 Management needs to plan for the application.

It is evident that awareness of the new WHS laws has meant more businesses are looking to implement systems that can provide them assurance of contractor compliance.”
OHS solution challenges

There are a number of common challenges and pitfalls that organisations face in getting the most out of either new or existing OHS management solutions. These same challenges or mistakes are often repeated even within the same business, according to Coakley, who says the most common challenges include good utilisation of an application’s capabilities, good management and knowledge of an application, and a good culture of utilisation. “For these things to be successful, it comes down to the type of person/s them it, and ultimately the committed support of the management team,” he says.

Johnson notes that economic and world market pressures mean businesses need to achieve more in less time. In addition, turnover of key staff can provide continuity problems as many work processes are dependent on staff who drive the behaviours and performance. “This is why it is important to have the correct software and a software provider who can provide the backup and support to ensure there is always continuity of supply,” he says.

“It is also important to understand the value of working with a software supplier that has broad experience. Having an expert that can walk into your business and overhaul multiple processes but also understand and consider the individual needs of each department is possibly the single most important factor that is overlooked.”

With some organisations adopting the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) approach, Hayes says the sheer variety of smart devices available presents another challenge. “Operating systems, screen sizes and interface elements can all vary, creating additional complexity. The company-wide administration of mobile devices is a significant challenge in itself,” he says.

Considering the single platform approach, the capabilities of the underlying platform should be assessed before deciding to add specialised business processes, adds Hayes, otherwise organisations run the risk that usability and functionality may be compromised in the interests of avoiding the overheads associated with multiple platforms.

Making the most of solutions

Before a software solution can be assessed for suitability, Hayes says it is critical that an organisation should clearly understand and articulate its business processes, including key metrics. “Software solutions should be configured to support the defined business processes, not the other way around. It is also important that the software is capable of providing the output necessary for timely and informed decisions to be made,” he says.

Johnson asserts that the culture of an organisation and how far advanced it is on the WHS journey will determine where to start with a client. “It is important to assist organisations to walk before they run,” he says.

“There is an important role for software, and it should be seen as a supporting role to the main goal of assisting the organisation to achieve their WHS requirements. We advise our clients when implementing new software, to plan for widespread communication across all stakeholders. Selecting a software company that understands this and has experience in change management will ensure the software successfully meets the needs of people that are expected to use it.”

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A smart approach to sun safety

A multifaceted approach and commitment from staff have been central to the success of Greater Shepparton City Council’s program to minimise environmental hazards such as ultraviolet (UV) radiation.

The Greater Shepparton City Council (GSCC) was formed in 1997 following local government amalgamations in Victoria. With 650 staff, the council has taken a proactive approach to minimising and managing a wide range of safety risks.

The council’s “Working during extreme weather” program is designed to minimise environmental hazards such as ultraviolet (UV) radiation, according to Virginia Boyd, manager performance, Greater Shepparton City Council, who says the program comprises three actions: identifying environmental hazards for workers; implementing effective control measures; and audit and review.

As part of the program, she says council managers and supervisors are required to identify hazards that may be present due to the environment and provide appropriate work procedures, such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and continual monitoring of their effectiveness.

They are also required to encourage employees to monitor weather conditions to ensure they are not putting themselves or others at risk, and access forecast weather conditions (from radio, Bureau of Meteorology websites, intranet etc).

Identifying hazards and implementing control measures

Boyd explains that risk assessments are conducted to identify effect on workers from possible extreme weather conditions. The risk assessment should consider the following: workers’ exposure to damaging UV levels (a UV level of 3 and above causes skin and eye damage) or adverse cold weather; PPE requirements; procedures to deal with extreme weather days; and access to shade.

Implementing effective control measures, says Boyd, involves articulating strategies for dealing with different working environments, hot weather and high UV. Strategies are developed based on a number of factors, including the nature of the task being performed; access to shade; availability to rotate duties; more frequent breaks or extension of breaks; ability to adjust the work/rest regime due; and use of PPE such as broad-brimmed hats.

Employees working outdoors for more than 15 minutes are required to wear long-sleeves tops, long pants and an appropriate hat for sun protection. However, she says PPE for work outdoors between 1 September and 1 May, or days where the UV index levels are expected to exceed 3 include a wide-brimmed hat with a rim of at least 8 centimetres wide or a bucket hat with a rim of 6-7 centimetres and constructed from material that transmits less than 10 per cent of UV radiation; and long-sleeved shirts and long trousers or long skirt/dress.

Other sun protection measures include sunscreen lotions, which are to be provided and available on location for outdoor employees and should exceed a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30+, as well as training for outdoor employees detailing the potential hazards of UV radiation exposure, the use of PPE and the application of sunscreens that should be applied hourly due to the sweating process removing the product from the skin.

Safety, culture and the sun

In order to build the Working during extreme weather program into council’s OHS culture, Boyd says the procedure has been linked with other local and state documents, such as the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, Beaufort Wind Force Scale and Greater Shepparton Heatwave Plan 2009.

Alongside this, the council has undertaken a range of strategies to improve conditions for workers, including discussing issues at employee induction; referring to UV in volunteer and contractor inductions and within e-learning course on working outdoors; displaying SunSmart posters in all workplaces; providing sunscreen at workplaces and in vehicles; conducting free skin checks for staff; and displaying expected UV ratings at work areas, pools and childcare facilities.

In 2012 the council also hosted SunSmart’s workplace education program, partnering with Cancer Council Victoria’s SunSmart Program, says Boyd. The project involved offering free open sessions to workplaces in Shepparton and its surrounding areas. The sessions were targeted towards workers and employers in the Hume area, as well as council staff.

“Many participants indicated that the session influenced them to think about making changes to procedures and practices in their organisations. These responses focused largely on the education of staff and colleagues,” says Boyd.

“Council and staff would recommend businesses and organisations, particularly those in regional areas and with outdoor workers, consider the program as a way of educating workers about UV protection in the workplace.”
Points for improvement

Sun protection can be a difficult issue for many people working within the OHS industry, according to Boyd. “However, the risks speak for themselves,” she says. In Australia it is estimated that approximately 200 melanomas and 34,000 non-melanoma skin cancers per year are due to occupational exposure to UV.

Between 2000 and 2009, a total of 1360 workers’ compensation claims for sun-related injury/disease were made in Australia, at a total cost of $38.4 million. The number and cost of compensation claims relating to sun-related injury/disease showed an upward trend during this period.

“UV is often forgotten as a workplace risk, especially when it can get lost in a long list of other workplace risks, such as working with machinery and in the heat. The potential danger, however, has been proven time and time again. Australia remains one of the skin cancer capitals of the world,” says Boyd, who notes that outdoor workers receive five to 10 times more UV exposure than indoor workers each year.

As with any change process, she says actions take time, consultation, clear communication between head offices and satellite sites, support and commitment from all levels of the organisation as well as an allocation of resources.

The key to the success of the program, which was last reviewed in June 2012, has been its multifaceted approach and commitment from all staff, according to Boyd. “Council’s UV protection program has involved a number of staff from various departments of council. This has included human resources, volunteers, information technology, outdoor staff, pools and childcare. Without the involvement of all of these people, the program and procedures wouldn’t happen.”

Making workplaces “sun safe”

Workplaces are improving when it comes to protecting their employees from the harmful effects of UV, according to Sue Heward, SunSmart manager at Cancer Council Victoria.

“More and more employers are recognising the damaging health effects of UV (skin and eye damage and most significantly skin cancer) and are realising the importance of protecting their employees against the damaging effects from overexposure to the sun in the workplace,” she says.

The first step to developing a comprehensive workplace sun protection program is consulting with workers and/or representatives, and SunSmart recommends that workplaces:

- conduct periodic assessment of the UV exposure risk to all workers
- provide information, instruction, training and supervision for workers
- provide sun protection control measures in line with occupational hazard controls – provide shade, modify reflective surfaces, reschedule outdoor work programs, provide personal protective equipment and clothing (broad-brimmed hats, sunglasses, clothing, sunscreen)
- develop a sun protection policy documenting control measures, that is endorsed by senior management
- implement a monitoring and review process to determine the effectiveness of control measures and identify changes that may further reduce exposure.

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SWMS: are we “swimming” or sinking?

A number of issues associated with SWMS in Victoria’s construction industry were recently discussed at the 11th SIA OHS Construction Forum, writes Gloria Kyriacou Morosinotto

The importance of avoiding health and safety management practices that focus on generic and “tick and flick” type safety is a common discussion amongst professionals in the construction industry. The nature and characteristics of the construction industry demand that health and safety management practices are effective, inclusive, applicable and specific. The high risk, dynamic nature of the industry and of each specific construction site has resulted in the requirement for the development of Safe Work Method Statements, referred to as SWMS (pronounced swims) for high risk construction work to be mandated in Victorian health and safety legislation.

To discuss these issues, the 11th SIA OHS Construction Forum, titled “SWMS: Are we swimming or are we sinking?” was recently held at RMIT University in Melbourne. The panel of speakers included Gerard Ayers (CFMEU), Matt Hudson (Equiset), Allan Beacom (WorkSafe Victoria), John Darcy (Master Builders Association) and Jon Temby (director of Avento and chairman of the Victorian Branch of the SIA). All presenters provided their perspective on SWMS in the construction industry.

Introducing SWMS

As the SIA OHS Construction Forum founder and chief organiser, Melbourne, I provided an introduction to the topic of SWMS by summarising current legislative requirements, and shared my experiences as an OHS professional working with large construction companies, small contractors and as a consultant with regard to SWMS and JSAs.

I outlined the disturbing trends that are emerging in the construction industry with regard to SWMS and noted that SWMS had evolved into documents that are no longer achieving the objective of managing risks to health and safety for site- and task-specific activities in an inclusive and practical manner, as was intended originally. SWMS have become overly complicated and unworkable, with too much detail and information that is not relevant to the people undertaking the work activity.

How effective are SWMS?

Gerard Ayers, the CFMEU’s OHS&E manager, construction and general division – Victorian Branch, argued that there is little evidence-based research on the topic of SWMS and that the effectiveness of SWMS is unknown. From a union perspective, he challenged the audience to ask themselves who actually benefits from SWMS? Ayers stated that SWMS must be inclusive and that OHS representatives must be involved in the development and implementation of SWMS in the construction industry.

He noted legislation mandates the requirement for consultation and that employers must involve employees in the process. Ayers also stated that SWMS are becoming too large, complex and detailed, and that the over complexity of SWMS today coupled with the lack of employee inclusion on the development and implementation of SWMS is potentially making them less effective.

Two SWMS debates

John Darcy, OHS manager for the Master Builders Association of Victoria, said there are two debates regarding SWMS in the construction industry. The first debate relates to determining which model should be used. He stated that the Office of Federal Safety Commissioner (OFSC) agreed to a specific model for SWMS for all organisations aiming to be accredited under the OFSC scheme to work on government-funded construction projects. The OFSC criteria impose requirements that have resulted in SWMS being overly complex and detailed, and have resulted in principal contractors being forced to demand higher requirements from their subcontractors.

The second point discussed by Darcy related to the level of detail to be included in SWMS and whether SWMS should be developed only for high risk construction work defined by legislation or as a catch-all. He argued that more education is required to be provided, particularly for the housing construction sector, in relation to SWMS and the legislative requirements imposed on all duty holders in order to effectively manage health and safety in construction.

SWMS need reality check

Matt Hudson, OHS manager at Equiset Constructions, agreed with many of the arguments presented by other panel members. He stated that from the SWMS’s inception via the Victorian OHS Regulations 2007, he has witnessed SWMS move from the original concept where stakeholder involvement was fundamental to the development of SWMS for high risk construction work, to today’s SWMS being developed with very little involvement from the workers that are most likely affected by the document. Hudson stated that SWMS are generally developed away from site and are of a generic nature and that this is predominately due to the belief that SWMS are an administrative responsibility and subsequently developed by people with little or no involvement with the high risk activity.

He said that the structure of today’s SWMS are at such a high level that they have become unworkable and unable to be understood by workers, many of whom have basic literacy skills. With incident and injury rates excessively high in the construction industry, the massive cost of developing SWMS with little to no involvement from the actual task participants, combined with the litigious nature of the industry, Hudson said it would make sense to see a review for the ongoing requirement of SWMS and their relevance to a safer construction industry.
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Current SWMS standards
Allan Beacom, manager of the construction program at WorkSafe Victoria, questioned the effectiveness of the current standard of SWMS in the construction industry and agreed that there are many issues of concern related to SWMS in the construction industry. Beacom argued that SWMS are overly complicated and have too much irrelevant information that make them unable to be understood and used by the workers actually undertaking the high risk construction work.

He stated that SWMS, as intended by the legislation, can be very effective and are designed to be a tool to be used to manage health and risks in dynamic working environments such as construction for site-specific and task-specific activities. The development of SWMS must be an inclusive process, and Beacom said SWMS of today have moved away from the simple, effective, inclusive approach that was previously used to a more complicated and less practical approach that is not achieving the original objective of the SWMS.

Simplifying SWMS
Jon Temby, director of Axento and chairman of the Victorian Branch of the SIA, asked whether we needed encyclopaedias of SWMS information focused on compliance or whether we should be assisting workers to recognise and deal appropriately with the differences from normal associated with the particular task on the particular work site and only document the differences? He discussed a 105 page SWMS he had seen, and Temby said if we look at adult learning principles and the ability of the human brain to learn and understand new information, clearly a 105 page SWMS cannot be seen to be a valid tool to assist workers to do their jobs safely. The one or two key points that they may need to know today become lost in background information irrelevant to the workers themselves.

He argued that it is time to rethink how we assist our workers with relevant information to enhance their safety on the job, and suggested that perhaps all the background information should be located in the safety management system and training records or in a site safety management plan.

Temby also said enhanced health and safety performance and business outcomes could result from workers being given flexibility within boundaries to complete the job; innovative solutions being expected; and informed variation being encouraged within the context of the workers’ training, skills, location and concurrent activities.

Each of the panel presenters provided an insight into the various issues of concern associated with the current standard of SWMS in the construction industry, and audience members reiterated those concerns. It was unanimously agreed that the current standard of SWMS in the construction industry is not acceptable and they are no longer achieving the objective of providing a tool to effectively manage the risks to health and safety associated with site- and task-specific activities in the construction industry in a simple, inclusive and practical manner. It is clear that the utilisation, objective, practicability and value of SWMS have changed significantly since the previous JSA model and approach that was used since the 1980s. It is apparent that the original objective of the SWMS as intended by the industry and the regulator has been lost, and this situation has resulted from a number of contributing factors and action in this regard is required.

Gloria Kyriacou Morosinotto is director of Contract Safety Solutions, the SIA building and construction industry champion and SIA OHS Construction Forum founder and chief organiser.

It was unanimously agreed that the current standard of SWMS in the construction industry is not acceptable.
Principles of Occupational Health & Hygiene

Edited by Sue Reed, Dino Pisaniello, Geza Benke & Kerrie Burton.

Published by Allen & Unwin in association with AIOH

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It is a credit to the Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists (AIOH) that they have continued to support and update this excellent reference resource for health and safety practitioners. This text has grown out of the earlier Occupational Health and Hygiene Guidebook compiled by Dr David Grantham in 1992 (and subsequently updated in 2007 and 2013 under new title). The breadth of the value of the text is further highlighted in that, in September 2011, a Mandarin translation was published. The majority of the 26 authors of this new edition are members of the AIOH, and further AIOH members have peer-reviewed the chapters.

While most work-related incidents are the result of physical accidents (falls, impacts etc), in reading this book readers are reminded of the important role of safety practitioners to ensure that workers do not trade away their health just to have a job. However, workplaces today frequently contain a variety of materials and processes that are potentially hazardous to health. The statistics are alarming. In 1996, NIOSH estimated that 137 persons died each day in the USA from work-related illness and 16 died from traumatic injury. The authors described how hazard and exposure often go unrecognised by both employer and worker thus increasing risk exposure.

The book addresses chemical hazards, biological monitoring, indoor air quality, physical agents and biological hazards. It does not attempt to deal with ergonomics or the psychosocial effects related to work.

Each chapter has a similar layout with a brief introduction and historical context followed by topical content written in plain English. This brings consistency to the book. Further reading is included at the end of each chapter. These references are relevant and current with considerable use of the latest Safe Work Australia codes and model legislation. The final chapter considers emerging and evolving issues such as the ageing workforce, nanotechnology and wet work (optional: causing contact dermatitis). Each chapter is stand-alone so single topics can be researched independently by the reader.

The clear message in this book is that elimination of hazards is often the simplest and most effective control. Applying engineering solutions can be expensive unless implemented at the design stage, and administrative controls rely on worker compliance which is often unpredictable and uncertain. For this reason it is recommended that the OHS practitioners be involved in the design of new workplaces or processes.

As the interactions of risk factors in the workplace and personal risk factors come under increasing scrutiny, this text provides a solid base from which to engage in discussions and consultation for a more informed, proactive and healthy workforce.

Reviewed by Nan Austin, national manager work health and safety, Australian Red Cross Blood Service.
The Safety Institute of Australia Ltd is Australia’s peak professional body for health and safety professionals. Established more than 60 years ago, the Institute today has more than 4,500 members and aims to develop, maintain and promote a body of knowledge that defines professional practice in OHS.

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26-27 March 2014
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KEY CONTRIBUITIONS FROM:
Paul O’Connor, CEO, Comcare
Brian Long, Group Head of Environment Health & Safety, Lend Lease
Martin Ralph, Managing Director, Industrial Foundation for Accident Prevention (IFAP)
Anthony Morehouse, CEO, Dynamiq
Lincoln Eldridge, Managing Director, SAFEmap Australasia
Professor Sidney Dekker, School of Humanities, Griffith University
Elizabeth Bluff, Research Fellow: National Research Centre for OHS Regulation, Regulatory Institutions Network, Australian National University
David Caple, Adjunct Professor, La Trobe University and Director, David Caple & Associates Pty Ltd

KEY TOPICS AT THE 2014 NATIONAL SAFETY CONVENTION INCLUDE:
• Why safe organisations fail
• The critical nature of communication in complex environments
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• Does accreditation and compliance warrant the investment?
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