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In the last 20 years the number of OHS courses available in Australia has increased exponentially. We can now take short courses through private providers, vocational courses through TAFE and higher education courses at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. For those with the will, it is possible to plot and then follow a pathway through what sometimes feels like a maze, and achieve goals that fulfil career-related objectives.

The need for a sound educational base for one’s practice has never been in doubt, but has more recently been formalised through restructuring of membership grades within the SIA and with the definition of the term “suitably qualified” by the Victorian regulator. However, the multi-disciplinary nature of our profession has made the educational base difficult to define. Thus the Body of Knowledge (BoK) project through WorkSafe Victoria and Health and Safety Professionals Alliance (HaSPA), is extremely important to the future of our profession, the definition of “health and safety professional” and the development of educational programs.

At the same time that the BoK will inform the core “essentials” that courses deliver, it appears that the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) will also be influencing course structures broadly across the education sector. The AQF will set minimum standards and course durations, thus addressing what some of us fear we are seeing as “qualifications creep”, whereby the value of a recognised degree such as a Graduate Diploma or Masters is eroded by institutions that offer short or light-weight programs. Through the production of the “strengthened AQF” we will have greater confidence in qualification outcomes and improved national consistency (www.aqf.edu.au). It will also facilitate international comparisons.

Will the BoK and the AQF be enough to bring the students to the courses? Certificate IV courses continue to be a popular entry level program to the discipline and, notwithstanding the effects of the GFC, postgraduate programs seem to be maintaining their numbers. At undergraduate level, however, the picture is not so clear. Some programs are doing well while others are struggling or even closing.

There are many factors that influence the success or failure of an undergraduate degree course, not least of which is the level of support from the host institution. My own experience in three different universities over many years has been that the level of support is significantly influenced by the Vice Chancellor’s business goals and, perhaps more significantly, understanding of the discipline. Today I sense that many senior bureaucrats’ remain ignorant of the nature of the discipline; wrestling with the problem of pigeonholing the subject as engineering, management, health science, science or social science and, regardless of the decision, finding it necessary to generalise the qualification rather than badging it as a health and safety degree.

Regardless of the institution, all undergraduate health and safety degrees face the same challenge of marketing the discipline to school leavers and thus the title of the degree and its home base is very important.

“How do we make safety attractive to 18 year olds? Safety is often maligned in the media and in the workplace it is dumbed down to being described as ‘everyone’s responsibility’ and ‘common sense’.”

Dr Steve Cowley, FSIA, SIA National Publications, Editor
The model Work Health and Safety Act and the associated regulations and codes of practice are the most significant and much needed national reforms to OHS laws in Australia in more than 30 years. These new laws are not limited to the workplace and will apply to work wherever it is done in Australia as part of a business, that is, they apply as much to the home as they do to the workplace, as much to the road, rail, sport, airports, a hotel room, a shopping centre as they do to a factory, a shop or an office.

Safe Work Australia is about to commence a consultative process to assist a major review of the 2002-2012 National OHS Strategy, which is due to expire in May 2012. Safe Work Australia members will be undertaking consultations with various stakeholders such as the SIA on the effectiveness of the current national strategy and to inform the design of a new national strategy.

WorkSafe Victoria took the initiative in 2007 to establish the Health and Safety Professionals Alliance (HaSPA). Organisations in other countries have monitored the progress of HaSPA particularly in relation to its composition, proactive approach to improving health and safety prevention and continuous improvement, and its output. One of the HaSPA initiatives has been to work with professional associations such as the SIA, AIOH, HFESA and ANZSOM to establish online registers of certified OHS professionals or OHS specialists. In the case of the SIA, a “Find an OHS Professional” register was established in 2009 under a formal agreement with WorkSafe Victoria and is accessible via the SIA homepage.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Britain’s national regulator, and the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) in the UK have been impressed with the HaSPA initiative and monitored its purpose and progress including the current OHS body of knowledge development and implementation project. Therefore with such important and major initiatives being taken in Australia to help prevent death, injury and ill health, it was very pleasing to see the UK HSE announcement on 15 October, to establish a national consultants register to improve safety advice nationally within the UK. The UK initiative now needs to be considered for early application in Australia.

To be eligible to join the UK register, individual consultants will need to be either chartered members of the safety bodies IOSH, CIEH or REHIS or a Fellow of the IIRSM. Membership will mean they have a commitment to continuous professional development, a degree equivalent qualification, two years’ experience, professional indemnity insurance and are bound by a code of conduct to only provide sensible and proportionate advice. The scheme will be managed by the professional bodies themselves through a not-for-profit company, with HSE providing support. Visit the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk for further information.

Gary Lawson-Smith, CEO, Safety Institute of Australia Inc

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**Editorial Note**

“It was very pleasing to see the UK HSE announcement on 15 October, to establish a national consultants register to improve safety advice nationally within the UK”
Dear Sir:

The editorial note by Dr Steve Cowley in the October issue of OHS Professional, is a symptom of the malaise in OHS management. While his article bemoans the lack of recognition of "special value" of OHS professional knowledge, he dismisses the UK Common Sense Common Safety report by implying that it is overly simplistic and downgrades the importance of OHS professionalism.

Steve Cowley, as do so many OHS "professionals", misrepresents what "reasonably practicable" actually means. Properly understood, it has the same meaning as "common sense" where the actions required to ensure safety are the sound judgments of a properly informed, properly experienced person, who is responsible for balancing the real world of safety against the reality of keeping the wheels of industry turning. In this context, the legitimate role of an OHS professional is to understand the mind of such a person to determine systematically what the reasonably practicable standards of good practice are, and to assist duty holders to become properly informed about a systematic response to their legal duties.

Many OHS professionals and people in authority, spend their time telling real world duty holders what they should have done to prevent accidents in a perfect world, that never exists. According to Lord Robens’ dictum, safety improvements are the outcomes of evolutionary processes, not innovations presented by theoreticians who have no experience in balancing the existence of a business with the welfare of employees.

Until the value of profound knowledge applicable to each industry is given its proper status as the common sense basis of reasonable behaviour, we will continue to see frustrated professionals like Steve Cowley coming up with OHS solutions that receive the ridicule they deserve.

Warren Mills, director, CR Management Systems

Comment

While not previously aware that my solutions were deserving of ridicule, I am interested in alternative views that readers may have on the relationship between the test of practicability and "common sense" - SC
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NO MORE SLIPS AND FALLS ON WET AND OILY FLOORS
Managing harassment with OHS systems

In the wake of the Kristy Fraser-Kirk v David Jones Ltd & Ors case, OHS professionals have a lot to offer organisations which are seeking to develop systems to identify and manage the potential for claims of sexual harassment and sex-based discrimination, according to a national law firm.

“A lot of OHS professionals are used to a performance-based regulatory system, being one that is not reliant on private claims to drive outcomes,” said Paul Hardman, a Brisbane-based partner with Holding Redlich.

However, the real problem facing many Australian organisations is that the Board may not know about this risk before it ends up in court or the media – or both.

“The Board should insist on their organisation having in place an adequate system to monitor HR legal risks and to provide regular reports to the Board about how they are being managed and monitored.”

Charles Power, a Melbourne-based partner with Holding Redlich, said the David Jones case is a timely reminder that directors and senior managers face personal liability if they turn a blind eye to the risk of sexual harassment or sex-based discrimination claims.

“You can no longer regard the absence of complaints as a sign that things are okay,” he said.

Research improves safety of night time road workers

Positioning retro-reflective markers around the moveable joints of road worker clothing significantly increases visibility for night time road workers, according to research from the Queensland University of Technology’s School of Optometry.

By positioning retro-reflective markers on a worker’s moveable joints (ankles, knees, shoulders, waist, elbows and wrists), the research found that drivers were able to recognise a worker at a distance 3.4 times greater than when the same worker wore a standard vest with an equal amount of reflective material.

Conducted by the Queensland University of Technology’s professor Joanne Wood, the findings of the research have resulted in the adoption of biomotion clothing by the Queensland Government and changes to the Australian Standard for high visibility garments.

SIA advances OHS Body of Knowledge

The Safety Institute of Australia anticipates that drafts of the OHS Body of Knowledge project will be completed in January 2011, when there will be a peer-review process by other specialists in the area and selected OHS professionals.

The Body of Knowledge will be released as an e-book, and each chapter will address an identified concept, providing a summary of the concept and sub-concepts, the historical development of the concept, with reference to key papers and the applications of the concept.

“It is not a text book nor is it a program of study,” said Pam Pryor, secretary of the OHS Education Chapter for the Safety Institute of Australia.

“A concept approach has been chosen so that the Body of Knowledge can be applied in different contexts, such as varying sized organisations and different industries, and different frameworks such as a risk management framework or other frameworks.”

The body of knowledge project is “owned” by the Health and Safety Professionals’ Alliance (HaSPA), and in June 2009, WorkSafe Victoria provided substantial funding for the development and implementation of the project.

For more information on the body of knowledge, please see the professional development section on page 14 of this issue.
OHS and finance need to speak the same language

Safety professionals need a broader depth of education and experience in order to affect positive workplace change and influence senior executives, according to a global insurance and risk advisory firm.

This is particularly the case ahead of the Model Work Health and Safety Act, as it will broaden the C-suite’s safety responsibilities, said Rob Kosova, principal at Marsh.

Speaking at a recent workforce strategies forum in Sydney, he said CFOs are the most likely among the C-suite to be unaware of their own safety obligations.

“Most CFOs have little to do with an organisation’s human capital,” Kosova said.

“However, as defined by the new Act, those with the ability to affect the financial standing of a company, such as a CFO, are, for the first time, defined as responsible for OHS,” he said.

In view of this, Kosova said safety professionals have an opportunity to bring this Act to the attention of their executives, however they must have a solid grasp of their company’s operational and financial structure so they can bridge the gap of understanding in their own workplace.

Kosova said safety professionals should work with CFOs to address productivity, lost time, year-on-year savings and expenditures, and workers’ compensation.

NSW Government named and shamed over OHS

Following the decision of the NSW Government to renege on its agreement to implement the model Work, Health and Safety Act, Prime Minister Julia Gillard was right to expose the NSW Government’s poor record in presiding over a system that produces worse OHS outcomes than other Australian states, according to business groups.

NSW has some of the highest fines and high prosecution rates of employers, yet safety outcomes are below the rest of Australia, said Stephen Cartwright, CEO of NSW Business Chamber.

“The ‘guilty until proven innocent’ system doesn’t work,” he said.

Other states have shown that the best safety outcomes occur when government and business act as partners in reducing accidents and injuries, rather than acting as adversaries, said Cartwright.

“The High Court in the Kirk case condemned the ‘guilty until proven innocent’ system saying that the NSW Government had used the OHS system as a ‘sport’ against employers,” he said.

The NSW Government is in its “dying days” and “doesn’t care about its legacy”, said Cartwright, who observed that the NSW Government appears to be pursuing a “scorched earth” policy that will see the “very worst of government decisions” made up until the state election on 26 March 2011.

For an update on OHS harmonisation, please see the news report starting on page 10 of this issue.

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When NSW Premier Kristina Keneally announced on 17 October that she would not sign up to the model Work Health and Safety (WHS) Act in its current form, there was a strong and swift reaction from both the federal government and business.

The Premier – who is seeking to shore up union support before a 26 March state election next year – said the NSW Government would only be part of a national OHS system if it allowed unions to retain the right to prosecute employers for work safety breaches and that the onus of proof remains on employers to show they exercised due care.

While the NSW Government’s position has put OHS harmonisation in its current form on hold, the business and legal community are confident that a national OHS system – in one form or another – will come to pass, writes Craig Donaldson.

Numerous polls indicate that the NSW Labor government won’t win the next state election unless a number of issues are fixed within the state Labor party. And even if Premier Keneally’s party is returned to power, Prime Minister Julia Gillard has threatened to use federal powers to force NSW to comply with a national OHS regime. The federal government has also threatened to withhold up to $144 million to compensate NSW to assist with deregulation. “A deal is a deal and the federal government requires this deal to be honoured,” said Prime Minister Gillard, upon learning that the NSW government was reneging on its commitment.

A legal perspective
While a number of legal experts agree that OHS harmonisation will prevail, there are differences of opinion in how it should and will come to pass. Cormack Dunn, a senior associate in the employee relations practice at Freehills, says the movement for harmonisation is “gathering significant pace” and he believes the model WHS Act will pass into law in all applicable jurisdictions on 1 January 2012.
The federal government will not need to resort to using its constitutional powers to bring in national OHS legislation, “because once cool heads prevail the threat to the state [of NSW] of losing all influence in its jurisdiction is likely to be of greater concern than the perceived loss of some powers”, Dunn says.

As such, he says the content of the model WHS Act will not deviate from that approved earlier this year by the Workplace Relations Ministers’ Council. “It is my understanding that all safety regulators in Australia, including WorkCover NSW, are making significant preparations so as to be ready for the introduction of legislation on 1 January 2012, says Dunn.

Similarly, Gerard Phillips, head of Middletons workplace relations and safety group, observes that the business community is working on the assumption that OHS harmonisation will come to pass. “I think the model laws will come into force in their current form. No other state will wear the amendments sought by the NSW government, which made its comments in full knowledge that they would torpedo the entire harmonisation process,” he says.

“If I was a betting person I’d say it’s going to go through,” says Phillips. On the off-chance the Labor government is returned to power in NSW, he believes there will be a “very, very serious consultation with the federal government some time after [the election] because the federal government can’t back down on this. All the other states who have signed up to it are not going to change that agreement because NSW has had a nervous breakdown over it – it just won’t happen,” he says.

**The test of time**

Siobhan Flores-Walsh, special counsel for the OHS group at Norton Rose Australia, also believes that the current crisis will pass if the NSW Labor government is ousted at the election. “The model OHS Act will therefore probably become law without change to its legislative architecture,” she says.

However, Flores-Walsh notes that the NSW government’s threat to walk away from harmonisation unless it secures two changes is not the source of the problem. “It is merely symptomatic of the fragility of any ‘national’ system of laws that depends on cooperation between state and Commonwealth Governments,” she observes.

“It is fair to say however that no one expected any of the state governments to move as quickly as NSW. Clearly, the fabric of the harmonised OHS laws will not be maintained by voluntary state government compliance. Only a single federal law can deliver a stable and reasonably uniform OHS regulatory regime.”

The vulnerability of harmonisation to the pressures of cooperative federalism was flagged long before the emergence of the “NSW position” says Flores-Walsh. “However, an ‘emperor’s new clothes’ aura has surrounded OHS harmonisation. Early comments that harmonisation would include significant jurisdictional differences at inception that would later increase were not well received.

“This meant that the architecture of harmonisation did not protect it from foreseeable political pressure to make jurisdictional changes to uniform national OHS laws.”

Flores-Walsh says a second best mechanism (by a long shot) is a clear and enforceable agreement between the state and federal governments that sets out obligations unambiguously, and specifies concrete consequences for breach. “Sadly, even the second best mechanism was not used to protect OHS harmonisation,” says Flores-Walsh, who notes that the relevant Intergovernmental Agreements do not clearly indicate if the proposed NSW action will constitute a breach and the consequences of breach are unclear.

**“All the other states who have signed up to it are not going to change that agreement because NSW has had a nervous breakdown over it — it just won’t happen”**

Gerard Phillips, workplace relations and safety group head, Middletons

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Phillips also agrees that the federal government legislating a national OHS system under the corporations power is “a completely preferable way to proceed”. While all state inspectors could be deemed inspectors for the purpose of a federal act, he says there would be significant practical problems in addition to delaying the commencement of the harmonised system.

**Issues for OHS professionals**

The primary challenge for OHS professionals under a harmonised OHS system will be responding to requests by the Board for greater assurance that their company is meeting its duty of care requirements, according to Dunn. “This will require OHS professionals to become more sophisticated in their dealings with the Board, as the Board will likely ask more poignant questions relating to the information contained in OHS board reports, the OHS governance arrangements and the extent to which the company’s current OHS arrangements are being regularly reviewed to ensure they meet the required safety standards,” he says.

There is a high level of awareness among many Boards of the duties that they will hold under the model legislation, according to Dunn, who observes that many Boards are seeking independent assurance that the measures that are in place are appropriate to ensure their company provides a safe place of work and that they are ultimately able to discharge their due diligence obligations.

“**Preparation for OHS harmonisation now**

There are two practical steps that business should undertake now to prepare for OHS harmonisation, according to Siobhan Flores-Walsh, special counsel for the OHS group at Norton Rose Australia.

The first step is to undertake 10 critical actions now:

1. Undertake a legal risk analysis
2. Undertake a gap analysis
3. Review, revise and supplement OHS policies and procedures (with particular emphasis on consultation issues)
4. Review contracts to ensure that they will facilitate compliance under the new laws (many contracts will operate for a long time after the commencement of OHS laws)
5. Develop consultation procedures to work with other obligation holders (e.g. contractors, suppliers etc) to ensure that common obligations are handled appropriately and OHS systems “mesh” safely together.
6. Develop consultation procedures and representation processes for workers as well as “issue resolution” processes
7. Ensure effective processes for union right of entry
8. Review and revise all aspects of corporate governance for OHS to ensure effective management and ‘due diligence’.
9. Develop a program to ensure that workers and officers can respond to the exercise of the regulator’s coercive powers with minimum stress.
10. Prepare to digest the regulations and codes due to arrive 2010/11 and develop processes to implement consequential system changes as well as worker and officer training.

Second, Flores-Walsh recommends designing and implementing education processes to maximise worker and officer receptiveness to the changes and minimise any backlash.

“The extent of any backlash will depend on the extent to which individuals are affected,” she says. “For example, those in the officer category may feel threatened by their increased personal liability if they are not familiar with officer liability. Equally, workers may be alarmed about losing the right to refuse to answer an inspector’s questions given the increased criminality of OHS offences and the implications of giving evidence.”

This means that as well as ensuring that business has appropriate systems and tools for workers and officers to fulfil their duties, it should introduce two levels of training.

The first is to create readiness and receptiveness for change by giving workers and officers a high level understanding of the changes (and perhaps providing that training more than once, using different delivery mechanisms), and Flores-Walsh says the second is technical training about the law, new systems and processes as well as transferring practical skills to workers and officers so they can competently and confidently work in the new framework.
The Lord Young report proposes some of the most significant changes to health and safety in the UK in decades, writes Craig Donaldson

There should be a clampdown on “absurd” applications of health and safety legislation, health and safety consultants should be nationally accredited and tighter controls should be imposed on “no win-no fee” lawyers seeking compensation on behalf of clients from employers.

These are a number of recommendations from a recent UK government report, which proposes some of the most significant changes to health and safety in the country in decades.

The landmark report also recommends simplification of risk assessments for some businesses, extra scrutiny of councils which ban events on health and safety grounds and ensuring that emergency services are not at risk of litigation for acts of heroism.

Former Government minister, Lord Young of Graffham, led the Whitehall-wide review of health and safety law and practice at the request of UK Prime Minister David Cameron.

“I believe that a ‘compensation culture’ driven by litigation is at the heart of the problems that so beset health and safety today,” said Lord Young in the report.

The rise of claims management companies over the last decade has had a dramatic impact on the way the nature of compensation is perceived, and Lord Young said accident victims are given the impression that they may be entitled to handsome rewards just for making a claim regardless of any personal responsibility.

“It’s a climate of fear compounded by the actions of some health and safety consultants, many without any professional qualifications, who have a perverse incentive to take an overzealous approach to applying the health and safety regulations,” he said.

“As a consequence they employ a goal of eliminating all risk from the workplace instead of setting out the rational, proportionate approach that the Health and Safety at Work etc Act demands.”

As such, Lord Young recommended that all health and safety consultants in the UK qualify for a professional certification, accredited under relevant professional bodies.

Initially, the UK’s Health and Safety Executive (HSE) could take the lead in establishing the validation body for qualifications, working with relevant sector and professional bodies. However, this function should be run by the professional bodies as soon as possible, said Lord Young in the report, Common Sense, Common Safety.

The report also recommended simplifying risk assessment procedures for low hazard workplaces such as offices, classrooms and shops.

Lord Young recommended that the HSE create and make available simpler interactive risk assessments for low hazard workplaces, and also create periodic checklists that enable businesses operating in low hazard environments to check and record their compliance with regulations.

Furthermore, police officers and firefighters should not be at risk of investigation or prosecution under health and safety legislation when engaged in the course of their duties if they have put themselves at risk as a result of committing a heroic act, according to the report.

While the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act remains an effective framework for OHS across the country, the report said “the standing of health and safety in the eyes of the public has never been lower, and there is a growing fear among business owners of having to pay out for even the most unreasonable claims”.

HSE, IOSH welcome Lord Young review

Health and safety is being used by too many people as a convenient excuse to hide behind, and it is often invoked to disguise concerns over costs or complexity, an unwillingness to defend an unpopular decision or simple laziness, according to Judith Hackitt, Chair of the UK Health and Safety Executive.

Commenting on the Lord Young report, Hackitt said it was important to champion a sensible and proportionate approach to dealing with serious risks in the workplace, rather than eliminating every minor risk from everyday life.

Anything that is going to make a difference and a distinction between health and safety that focuses on “real risks” and “much of the rubbish that’s done in our name can only be good news as far as I’m concerned”, she said of the Lord Young review.

Rob Strange, chief executive of the UK’s Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, also welcomed Lord Young’s recommendations. “We think this review could see a turning point for health and safety in the UK by turning the focus away from daft decisions about conker competitions and hanging baskets and back onto saving people’s lives in genuinely hazardous areas of work and public life,” he said.
The OHS Body of Knowledge will form the basis for professional certification, assist educators with the development of learning and guide OHS professionals in their professional development, writes Pam Pryor

The need for a professional certification process for OHS professionals was identified by Maxwell in reviewing the Victorian OHS legislation. He recommended that “This industry may benefit from some form of industry based accreditation scheme, similar to those operating in the accounting field, so that customers can gain a level of confidence about the consultants that they may engage” (page 271).

In response to this recommendation the Health and Safety Professionals’ Alliance (HaSPA) developed a Victorian Code of Ethics and Minimum Service Standards for Professional Members of OHS Associations. These minimum service standards include the requirement for professional certification of OHS professionals providing independent advice. Criteria for certification includes completion of an approved education program or some alternative means of establishing that the applicant has the required knowledge, expertise and competencies; demonstrated practical expertise; and a minimum period of full-time practice or its equivalent.

During the discussions underpinning the development of the code and minimum standards, members of HaSPA identified that the lack of a recognised core Body of Knowledge informing the education and practice of generalist OHS professionals not only impacted on the quality of advice in the workplace but also inhibited the implementation of a professional certification process. The lack of a defined core body of knowledge for OHS professionals was also identified in the study Safeguarding Australians: Mapping the strengths and challenges toward sustainable improvements in OHS education and practice.2

Thus in June 2009 WorkSafe Victoria provided substantial funding for the development and implementation of the core body of knowledge for generalist OHS professionals. The project is “owned” by HaSPA; technical aspects of the project are developed and managed by a Technical Panel comprising representatives of La Trobe University, University of Ballarat, RMIT University and the OHS Education Chapter of the Safety Institute of Australia. As HaSPA is not a legal entity, the Safety Institute of Australia is the contract holder and responsible for financial governance. While the project is funded in Victoria and managed by a Technical Panel mainly based in Victoria the project has national implications and the project plan includes extensive input from interested parties nationally.

The Body of Knowledge will be an e-book with chapters addressing the core concepts that all OHS professionals should be able to engage in discussion of and apply as appropriate to their practice. It is not a text book nor is it a program of study. Each chapter will address an identified concept, providing a summary of the concept and sub-concepts, the historical development of the concept with reference to key papers and the application of the concept to the practice of an OHS professional in prevention of work-related fatality, injury, disease and ill-health (FIDI). A concept approach has been chosen so that the Body of Knowledge can be applied in different contexts, such as varying sized organisations and different industries, and different frameworks such as a risk management framework or other frameworks. A number of authors have been selected for their expertise to write the various chapters. It is anticipated that the drafts will be completed in January 2011 when there will be a peer-review process by other specialists in the area and also selected OHS professionals.

The implementation phase of the Body of Knowledge includes the establishment of a course accreditation process for university level OHS professional education programs and also developing criteria and process for professional certification.

A draft proposal for accreditation of university-level OHS education was widely circulated for comment in October and the final version will be announced early in 2011. Research and consultation on the criteria and process for professional certification, including how the required knowledge, competencies and demonstrated practical expertise will be defined, will occur in early 2011. Completion of an accredited OHS program will be one way of demonstrating the required knowledge but there will be an alternative route for those people who have not completed accredited study to demonstrate that they have the core concepts of the body of knowledge. Criteria will also be defined for other skills and attributes important to an effective OHS professional.

The Body of Knowledge is important for all practicing and future OHS professionals as not only will it form the basis for professional certification but educators of OHS professionals will use it to inform the development of their learning programs and OHS professionals will use it to guide their professional development. The Body of Knowledge will also be important to regulators, employers and recruiters as a standard for OHS professionals.

Note: There is some concern among VET qualified people working in OHS as to the impact of the Body of Knowledge project on their professional status. The brief for the WorkSafe-funded project is specifically directed to university-level OHS professional education but this does not preclude an accreditation process for VET-level OHS qualifications in the future. Also, while not yet developed, it is likely that the professional certification process will also address VET qualified practitioners.

Pam Pryor is secretary of the Safety Institute of Australia’s OHS Education Chapter.

Q&A: OHS qualifications/training and injury prevention in the workplace

Q: What is the importance of OHS qualifications/training for OHS practitioners?

OHS qualifications and training are, in my opinion, not possible to separate from being a professional OHS practitioner. There is no other serious profession that does not have mandatory training in a core body of knowledge, for example accounting, engineering, medical, teaching, nursing. OHS qualifications assist in increasing your knowledge and expertise so that you can more effectively undertake your role.

The challenge at present, as we are moving into more mandatory or common qualifications, is to assist those practitioners of long standing, without qualifications, to be able to demonstrate through competency that they are at least at similar levels to formal qualifications. Alternatively, employers would be well placed to assist their staff to gain formal qualifications. In my organisation, I have sponsored all of the safety team that do not have formal qualifications to undertake further studies.

It should be noted that there are extremely good OHS practitioners who have not gained formal OHS qualifications of Cert IV, Diploma or above. However, it is a decreasing pool of employers who will take on the risk of hiring people without qualifications.

Q: How important is the role of training in injury prevention in the workplace?

Training clearly has a role in injury prevention in the workplace. It does however, need to be remembered, that under hierarchy of controls, training is an administrative control at the lower levels of effectiveness. It is a considerable challenge to organisations to develop and ensure that training is available, and effectively delivered to people that need it.

Training is not just face-to-face classroom or e-learn it includes on the job training. All of this training should in my opinion, be competency-based. The other challenge is to ensure that the balance between ease of delivery (for example, e-learning), effectiveness and cost should be considered when developing solutions. The risk that the training is to address will assist employers to work through which of these options is best.

Q: What is the importance of OHS qualifications/training for OHS practitioners?

Many of the OHS practitioners that are employed within the mining industry have come from an operational background, from field assistants, drillers, samplers and equipment operators through to geologists and mining engineers. Their previous experience provides a valuable understanding of the task and operational requirements, but it is only through formal learning that specific OHS skills, knowledge and understanding can be gained.

It is not only how that is gained through practical experience, but more importantly what is learnt through formal OHS training.

Formal OHS training includes managing, by applying the principles of risk assessment and management, identifying hazards and implementing controls, investigation methodology as well as grounding in OHS law, acts and regulations.

Entry level/trainee OHS advisors typically have, or are enrolled in a Certificate IV in OHS, and as they move through to a senior OHS advisor they gain the Diploma in OHS. The OHS managers are encouraged to progress through a Graduate Certificate or Graduate Diploma in OHS.

Q: How important is the role of training in injury prevention in the workplace?

By having an in depth understanding of the risks, and subsequent risk management through formal training, many of the risks should be eliminated, or at least significantly reduced. The fundamentals that are learnt through the Certificate IV and Diploma of OHS may have to be reinforced and expanded using dedicated and specific training on the task, and the hierarchy of controls that are appropriate.

This expanded training program is including more focus on the health of workers, including fitness, fatigue management, diet and general health issues such as smoking and responsible alcohol consumption. Many tertiary programs, particularly undergraduate courses have seen these topics included, and I am sure you’ll see the VET programs following suit very soon. By spending quality time educating workers on their health and fitness, this is showing an improvement and focus on many of the high risk tasks and therefore assisting with the injury prevention.
The OHS training and education system is somewhat of a patchwork quilt in Australia. However, as Craig Donaldson reports, there are a number of developments underway to improve and standardise the quality of training and education for OHS professionals at all levels.

OHS training and education: the state of the nation
When it comes to university qualifications, there are a number of undergraduate degree courses and postgraduate programs in health and safety around Australia. While the content of standard three year undergraduate OHS degrees tends to be fairly consistent, one of the weaknesses in such degrees is that “there isn’t time to get in a substantial amount of practicum”, according to Mike Capra, professor of occupational health and safety in the faculty of health sciences at the University of Queensland.

“One of the criticisms in the undergraduate programs has been that you have got school kids coming out with no real life or workplace experience. If we can address that by putting in a significant amount of practicum, and I would say a semester is a significant amount, we can overcome that.”

The quality of undergraduate OHS courses is really up to individual universities which have their internal quality control mechanisms, and “I think it’s pretty good across most of the degrees in Australia,” says Capra.

“From my perspective, I’ve been pushing the undergraduate programs because I think these programs give people a very, very strong theoretical basis to their practice,” he says. Not all undergraduate programs are the same, according to Capra, who says some universities may have an emphasis more on chemistry and some might have an emphasis more on social sciences. “So there will be some variability,” he says.

One of the issues for the OHS profession in Australia is a shortage of professionals, so Capra suggests a possible quick fix would be one year postgraduate programs which take in professionals such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists, nurses or other specialists with a legal, medical or human movement background.

Another problematic issue with OHS degrees is that a lot are conducted via distance learning, Capra says. “So there’s no interaction with students, and of course one of the areas of great importance in OHS is communication. So it’s a bit hard to teach communication by distance,” he says.

“Postgraduate courses

While there is a general level of consistency in the undergraduate programs, the same cannot be said of the postgraduate courses, according to Pam Pryor, secretary of the OHS Education Chapter for the Safety Institute of Australia.

“The issue arises in relation to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) at the postgraduate level,” says Pryor, who explains that different institutions offer postgraduate diplomas and Masters programs in OHS. The postgraduate diplomas are, on average, two years part-time in duration, however, some universities are offering a two year, part-time program which are being called Masters programs, says Pryor. “So we have a variation in duration of courses around Australia and I’m making the assumption that if there’s a variation in duration there’s also a variation in depth and scope of those programs,” she says.

“To some extent, I think it’s come about because the postgraduate qualifications are generally full fee paying, so they’re very expensive courses,” says Pryor. “So the students and the universities are looking for the best marketing angle. So if one university is offering a Masters after two years, it will appear attractive to students rather than a graduate diploma. So it may well be that it’s been used as a marketing lever in some cases.”

Pryor says the lack of consistency also causes confusion among employers. “I have actually had employers ring me up
and say ‘I’ve got a person here who has a two year part-time qualification called a Masters, and I have someone else who’s done three or four years and they’ve got a Graduate Diploma and a Masters. How do I compare the two?’ So there is confusion among employers and recruiters about expectations out of those qualifications,” she says.

The AQF has recommended a three year undergraduate degree followed up by one year full-time (or two years part-time) for a postgraduate diploma and two years full-time (or four years part-time) for a Masters, according to Pryor. “So if the universities comply with that then we will have some consistency, so that people will know what they’re getting,” she says.

“But what will also happen is that the universities who are currently offering Masters programs, either at two years part-time or three years part-time, will have to rename, restructure or revise their courses – so that will create problems for those universities as well.”

Whatever the AQF comes out with, Pryor is concerned about what enforcement measures will be used and how binding requirements will be on universities. “If the universities don’t like it, they’ll go their own way and we will end up with exactly the same situation as we’re in now,” she says.

“**If the universities don’t like it, they’ll go their own way and we will end up with exactly the same situation as we’re in now**”
Pam Pryor, secretary of the OHS Education Chapter, SIA

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**Business Services Training Package (BSB07)**

Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) recently conducted a Scoping Review of Business Services Training Package (BSB07) occupational health and safety qualifications and units of competency, which contain four generic OHS units and four qualifications primarily designed for use by OHS practitioners.

The review found that the operating environment for businesses and those working in the OHS field is changing. “OHS issues are increasingly complex, work practices and practices are changing, regulatory processes are becoming more proactive, clients have higher expectations and companies are beginning to recognise the potential costs of neglecting OHS responsibilities,” the review noted.

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**The role of the SIA OHS Education Chapter in OHS education and training**

The SIA OHS Education Chapter was formed in 2004 with the aim of promoting integrity of the OHS profession and improving health and safety in the workplace by enhancing the quality and sustainability of OHS education and training. This aim is to be achieved through:

- enhancing the role and profile of OHS university education and research
- influencing OHS education so that the education of OHS professionals and practitioners is based on strong scientific and technical concepts and is evidence-based and so recognised by the profession, government, industry and the community
- supporting OHS research as a basis for ensuring that OHS education reflects the current and emerging knowledge base
- promoting the development and use of teaching techniques and tools appropriate to OHS and to promote the measurement of teaching and learning effectiveness
- ensuring that OHS education is delivered by competent persons
- influencing vocational and workplace OHS training to ensure that it is based on sound OHS principles, reflects current best practices, and is delivered by competent persons
- developing a community of practice of OHS educators and trainers to forge national and international links with like-minded organisations.

To better achieve the aim and objectives the Chapter was restructured in 2009 to comprise two subgroups: the SIA-Academy of University OHS Education and Research, and the SIA-Vocational and Workplace Training Group.

In this time the Academy has made some significant moves in the research area. A research conference was conducted in April 2010 with the proceedings from this conference to be published this month; the inaugural SIA Three Minute Thesis Competition was held as part of Safety In Action; and an interactive web-based Research Register is being currently designed and should be live by December 2010. The Academy has also developed an Action Plan to work on issues such as the profile of OHS research and funding for OHS research.

In 2008/9 the Chapter was involved in the Australian Learning and Teaching Council project, Safeguarding Australians: Mapping the strengths and challenges towards sustainable improvement in OHS education and practice, which set a basis for the current WorkSafe Victoria funded project to develop and implement the core body of knowledge for generalist OHS professionals.

The SIA-Vocational and Workplace Training Group has not really become active since the restructure of the Chapter but a detailed submission was made to the scoping review conducted by Innovation and Business Skills Australia into the VET OHS qualifications.

The Chapter has a two year election cycle with elections to be held in early 2011. These elections will be the first since the restructure and it is important that motivated and committed people nominate and are elected to the executives for both the Academy and the Vocational and Workplace Trainers’ Group. The positions in the Academy are Head, Associate Head-Education, Associate Head-Research, Secretary and Committee member with the positions in the Vocational and Workplace Trainers’ Group being President, Vice President, Secretary and Committee member.

Membership of the Chapter is open to any financial members of the Safety Institute of Australia or of other Australian or New Zealand OHS professional bodies that are signatories of the Council of Safety and Health Association Presidents (COSHAP) and who have an interest in OHS education as a researcher, an educator of OHS professionals and practitioners, as a vocational trainer involved in OHS education and training, or an OHS workplace trainer. Election to an office-bearing position requires membership of the SIA.

Source: Pam Pryor, secretary, OHS Education Chapter, Safety Institute of Australia
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“...This has led to an increasing demand for OHS personnel and the consolidation and/or specialisation of many OHS practitioner roles together with a demand for a broader range of skills, while supervisors and managers are becoming far more conscious of OHS requirements.”

The report proposes that IBSA schedule a review of the BSB07 OHS units and qualifications to commence in the early part of 2011.

Among the recommendations in the report are that:
- IBSA liaise with Safe Work Australia concerning the outcomes from current work on the establishment of nationally agreed training arrangements in conjunction with the implementation of the model WHS Act
- IBSA liaise with Safe Work Australia concerning the outcomes from IBSA liaise with the SIA concerning its current review of practitioner and professional OHS roles to identify implications arising for the alignment of BSB07 OHS qualifications and units
- IBSA liaise with Safe Work Australia concerning the outcomes from IBSA initiate discussions with Safe Work Australia concerning the possibility of undertaking a joint review of the BSB07 generic OHS units and the ASCC units.
- IBSA liaise with Safe Work Australia concerning the outcomes from The above review would inform IBSA consideration of the inclusion of the additional generic units (once modified) into the BSB07 Training Package; this would need to be subject to the level of OHS regulator and industry support concerning the demand for a unit equivalent to OHS100, clarification of the purpose of the OHS456 unit, and resolution of alignment issues with OHS600.
- IBSA liaise with Safe Work Australia concerning the outcomes from IBSA revisit its policy on the lack of prerequisites in the BSB07 OHS qualifications, including the possible option of including some form of ‘partial nesting’ of key OHS units
- the next review of the BSB07 OHS qualifications incorporate a review of the packaging rules within qualifications, particularly the Certificate III in OHS, to ensure consistency with the related work roles and an appropriate number and mix of core and elective units.
Environmental responsibilities increase demand for training

As Environmental Management Systems (EMS) have now become an essential part of our standard operating procedures and thought processes, it is becoming increasingly necessary for field and operational staff in the industries of engineering, manufacturing, construction, and mining to take on the responsibilities of the supervision of on-site environmental compliance.

“Personnel such as OHS officers, quality assessors and production managers have the appropriate experience and qualifications when it comes to their chosen field; the main issue that exists is how to tackle their new environmental management tasks,” said Phil Abernethy, managing director of Absorb Environmental Solutions. “Many find they lack the knowledge of how to manage environmental impacts, including how to objectively complete an environmental site audit and to accurately measure the risk associated with each area.”

Seeing this demand in the market, Abernethy responded by creating a Certificate IV in On-Site Environmental Management in 2007. After extensive industry consultation, he decided the best approach was to design a comprehensive nationally recognised course that developed environmental management skills on a practical level, covering the legislation, theory and practice of delivering positive environmental outcomes.

Significantly, this course has provided attendees with a practical foundation in the policies and principles to create and implement their own Site Environmental Management Plan. The course has now been running for over three years with more than 750 participants from a wide range of industries and occupations, with the success of the course leading Abernethy to establish Absorb Training as a National Registered Training Organisation in early 2009.

Abernethy has now launched an Advanced Diploma of Environmental Management. Designed for environmental managers, this course builds on the Certificate IV course and concentrates on the practical application of environmental management and developing a deeper understanding of the issues which environmental managers are required to handle.

For more information contact Phil Abernethy, managing director of Absorb Environmental Solutions, on 1300 554 180 or email phil@absorbenviro.com.au.
In practice, it would appear that not a lot has changed over the years when it comes to labour hire companies providing OHS training for client candidates. Access to candidates for sufficient time to do any OHS training is a very big issue for the labour hire sector, according to Cassie Chadwick, general manager, health, safety, environment and quality for the Integrated Group, a national provider of recruitment, labour hire and managed labour services.

“This means our clients don’t allow us to have time with our candidates and they won’t necessarily want to do any training with our candidates that they sponsor. It would be a rare client company that would include candidates in any of their internal training,” says Chadwick, who notes that this is usually workplace level training for issues such as manual handling and chemical awareness.

Companies see it “as being not their responsibility” while candidates are seen “very much more as a commodity than they are as a group of persons who could contribute to the bottom line – hence the lack of desire for investment into training”, Chadwick observes.

Manual handling training solutions

The Integrated Group has instituted a national manual handling program, which is provided to internal employees and also sold to clients. “We’ve been conducting training at our expense with our OHS team, for their supervisors and trading that against being given time with our candidates and their shop floor people for the training if they want it. So we’ve basically become the trainers as such. It’s been the only way we can get access to our candidates,” explains Chadwick.

Generally, more mature organisations are easier to sell the solution to, as they can see benefit in OHS training and will make allowances for such training. However, industries that are more ‘just in time’ in their operational practices, such as a fast paced third-party logistics warehouse, is “almost impossible to get in front of”.

As each workplace differs markedly from others, another solution that Chadwick is trying is to go halves with clients in the cost of getting shop floor candidates for one-hour training sessions. “So the client pays for half an hour and we pay for half an hour.”

The other solution Chadwick uses is to train candidates away in their non-work hours (which has a compliance issue all of its own). However, sitting in a classroom is not very effective for most people, and Chadwick says that trying to find a workplace to conduct practical training so that it is relevant is “very tough indeed”.

“I’ve been with the labour hire industry now for seven and a half years, and to be truthful, I’m fighting the same battles now I fought when I first started. Not a great deal has changed.”

Other hot spots

While manual handling is a perennial OHS training issue, Chadwick says that there have also been hot spots in bullying as well as drugs and alcohol across some jurisdictions over the past 12 to 18 months. The only other changes in OHS training in recent times is that induction procedures in some office branches and sites have needed altering, but these changes are “as much political as they are anything else over the last two years”, says Chadwick.

“I’ve been with the labour hire industry now for seven and a half years, and to be truthful, I’m fighting the same battles now I fought when I first started”

Cassie Chadwick, general manager, health, safety, environment and quality, Integrated Group
Workplace alcohol and drug testing: the long and winding road

The effects of both alcohol and illicit drug use during and outside of work hours can have a significant negative impact on workplace health, safety and productivity, according to Paul Breslin

National and international research indicates that the effects of both alcohol and illicit drug use during and outside of work hours can have a significant negative impact on workplace health, safety and productivity.¹

Research indicates that approximately 62 per cent of alcohol and drug abusers in Australia are in full-time employment. This equates to 300,000 Australian workers.² The estimated cost to Australian economy through lost productivity attributed to hangovers, sick days, staff turnover and early retirement due to alcohol use is calculated at $3.6 billion a year.³

Alcohol and other illicit drug abuse in the workplace impacts on employers, employees and their coworkers, and families. The social and financial costs are borne across the community. The workplace does present particular challenges for employers and employees due to the potential for serious harms including social and financial costs resulting from accidents, injuries and productivity losses.⁴

Evidence suggests that good general management practices are the most effective method for achieving enhanced safety and productivity, lower absenteeism and turnover rates. Furthermore research indicates that a comprehensive workplace alcohol and illicit drug use policy could assist in addressing problems that arise because of alcohol and illicit drug in the workplace.⁵

Social and economic costs of alcohol and drug abuse
A recent report on the social aspects of Australians’ drinking revealed the following results;

- approximately half the workforce (47.8 per cent) drank at levels associated with risk of harm at least occasionally and 11 per cent did so frequently (at least once a week)
- 6.6 per cent of workers who drink alcohol have showed up to work drunk in a 12-month period.
- one in 10 workers reported that they usually drank alcohol in the workplace
- one in six workers has reported physical abuse at work by a colleague under the influence of alcohol or drugs, whilst one in seven suffered verbal abuse ⁶

⁴ Ibid
In 2004-2005 alcohol misuse cost approximately $3.6 billion in lost productivity in Australia. These costs were attributed to lost productivity through hangovers, sick days, staff turnover and early retirement due to alcohol use.\(^7\)

In terms of physical harm, alcohol has been found to be a contributing factor in an estimated 4 per cent of work-related fatalities and between 3-11 per cent of workplace injuries.\(^8\) Other drugs are estimated to contribute to 2 per cent of work-related fatalities. In total, it is estimated that alcohol and other drugs are contributing factors in at least 5 per cent of work-related fatalities.\(^9\)

**Strategies for eliminating the use of alcohol or other drugs in the workplace**

While there is no single way to address the problem of alcohol and other drugs at the workplace, there are a number of control strategies that may be adopted and implemented.\(^10\)

The aim of the strategy should be to eliminate or reduce alcohol and other drug-related harm as far as practicable. This objective could be achieved using a three-tiered approach: preventing harm through such steps as providing information and education; management of hazards through introducing procedures for dealing with affected persons at the workplace; and provision in the strategy for the return to usual work duties of affected employees.\(^11\)

**Developing and implementing an alcohol and other drugs policy**

Research indicates that workplace policies may help change the norms and culture around alcohol and illicit drug use, and may also assist in changing family and community attitudes. Workplace prevention programs may complement existing public health programs to help address substance use before people become dependent and need more specialised intensive interventions.\(^12\)

The Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia recommend that every Australian workplace should have an AOD policy as part of their broader occupational health and safety requirement, and as part of their insurance arrangements.\(^13\)

However the implementation of a AOD policy can raise difficult issues and usually involves balancing various rights and interests, including safety and health in the working environment, fair and reasonable treatment in employment, discipline, privacy, protection of personal freedoms as well as consideration of business and economic matters.\(^14\)

The AOD policy needs to be carefully implemented or there is a risk of dispute or the policy becoming ineffective. Some of the key elements to a successful development and implementation of an AOD policy include: genuine consultation with staff; education of staff; preparation of a clear policy; telling staff the consequences of breach of policy; consistent application of policy; and continued monitoring of the policy.\(^15\)

Staff should be involved in developing and implementing the AOD policy to promote awareness and understanding.\(^16\) The more diverse and encompassing the range of people involved in

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11. Ibid
15. Ibid
formulating the policy are, the more likely the policy will be viewed as relevant and appropriate. This includes input from OHS representatives and the unions.

**Training and education**

Providing information and training about alcohol and other drugs may also contribute towards developing a workplace culture where employees are prepared to encourage each other to work safely. The employer needs to ensure record and maintain evidence that employees have attended training sessions on the policy.

In the case of *Kidd v Linfox Australia Pty Ltd*, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) ordered that an employee, who was terminated for refusing to submit to a drug and alcohol test, be reinstated because he had not been properly trained in, or informed about, his employer’s drug and alcohol testing policy. The AIRC stated that it is not difficult to prove that an employee has been trained in to an employer policy. However, the AIRC found that this sort of evidence was absent in this case and that the employer had not complied with its own policy.

The policy should be explained to staff, subcontractors and their employees through information and/or training sessions, at staff meetings and during induction of new staff. Training and education can help in building the knowledge and skill of supervisors and other employees to identify and deal with alcohol and illicit drug related harm in the workplace.

It is important to note that drug and alcohol testing is not a panacea to improving safety standards in the workplace, but could be one small piece of the jigsaw.

Paul Breslin (M.App. Sci. (OHS) Grad Dip OHM, Diploma in OH&S, MSIA, MAIRM) is OHSE manager for Brookfield Multiplex. For the full research paper please email paul.breslin@au.brookfield.com

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The Dow Chemical Company is a global organisation with a portfolio of chemical, advanced materials, agrosciences and plastics businesses. It employs around 52,000 people across 37 countries, and in 2009, it annual sales figures were US$45 billion ($44.3 billion).

Dow’s global director of health services, Dr Catherine Baase, says that as part of the company’s business case, it is recognised that there is a strong link between economic impact and the health of its employees. “The health of our company depends on the health of our people,” says Baase. “The health of Dow’s employees, their families and the communities in which we operate is a strategic priority and is seen as essential to the company’s sustainability.”

Within Dow, Baase explains that health is a shared responsibility in which employees are provided with a comprehensive health and benefits package, as well as the tools and resources to help them lead a healthy lifestyle. This, in turn, enables them to improve their quality of life and reduce their out-of-pocket expenses, she adds.

Program fundamentals
Dow’s health strategy is built on four pillars:

**Preventive health.** The company provides an array of programs and services to minimise and/or reduce health risks and enhance the overall health of its employees. This encompasses things like weight management programs, health screenings and quit smoking programs.

**Quality and effectiveness.** Dow actively drives significant improvements in the quality, effectiveness and value of healthcare through the application of evidence and/or consensus-based quality care practices, resulting in improved health and effective management of healthcare costs.

**Health care system management.** The company establishes partnerships with health care vendors that use effective technology, protocols, customer service and quality measurements; are economically aligned and deliver optimum value to the company and its employees.

**Advocacy.** Dow uses its government affairs resources to encourage government officials to enact legislation and promulgate rules that foster the development of health plans and programs. “We’re very active in terms of trying to influence public policy and to help improve the health of communities,” Baase explains.

“We work with key health related organisations at state, national and global levels to support legislative changes that support prevention, the role of employers and investment in quality initiatives.”

**Results**
Employees are actively engaged in Dow’s health and wellness initiatives. Approximately 89 per cent of global employees and 79 per cent of US employees voluntarily participate in health assessments, and according to satisfaction surveys, 95 per cent value this option, “which is why we are able to attain such high participation rates without direct financial incentives to participate”, Baase says.

Furthermore, about 80 per cent of employees globally and 93 per cent in the US participate in one or more internal Dow health services each year.

In 2009, there was a continued trend of health risk reduction in Dow’s employee base, especially for the top three risk targets of tobacco use, physical activity and obesity. Between 2004 and September, 2009 there was a 23 per cent reduction in high risk people and a 17 per cent increase in low risk people in these three categories. “Overall, we’ve seen a decrease in the high risk level for 6 out of 8 risk factors and an increase in the low risk levels for 7 out of the 8 key risk factor categories tracked,” says Baase.
Return on investment
The key to gaining support for Dow’s health and wellness program is having a business case aligned to corporate priorities – and consistently reporting progress against that, according to Baase. “Through our business case we could show that [our old approach] was unsustainable and that there was opportunity for improvement,” she explains.

“The big issues for Dow are improved health, customer satisfaction and health care costs.

We’re moving in the right direction on three fronts, especially in the area of improved health, and have very aggressive targets in areas like glucose control, body mass index, physical activity, tobacco cessation [and] blood pressure control.”

Baase says that Dow’s 10-year targets are for 10 percentage point improvements in each area for both high and low risk. “We believe in audacious goals – and ones that will deliver measurable value to the company. So for example, about 20 per cent of Dow employees smoked at baseline in 2004. We’re committed to getting that number down to 10 per cent by year ten or 2015.”

The decline to date has been 23 per cent among tobacco users since 2004, and Baase says the prevention strategy is believed to have helped hold health care cost increases to 4.3 per cent a year from 2006 to 2009. “Through studies, we estimated that by improving our primary health risk factors by just one percentage point each per year, we would save US$62 million ($61.1 million) in US direct health care costs over 10 years.”

Challenges and lessons learned
“What’s changed certainly at Dow – and maybe industry-wide – is that wellness and productivity management are becoming more evidence- and value-based,” Baase asserts.

“And that’s a good thing. We’re challenged to think strategically and be just as cost-effective as any other division of the company.”

There have also been challenges for the company with globalisation and subsequent opportunities to improve workforce health, says Baase. “While many basic health needs and risks are common across the world, it is the local culture of both the community and company that determines the priorities, decision-making patterns and communication preferences for health,” she explains.

“A clear understanding of and fit with local culture, and adequate engagement of local stakeholders cannot be underestimated. Finding the appropriate balance between central and locally driven health promotion programming is an art, but is necessary to effectively leverage resources and add value to both company and employees.”

Dow’s health and wellness tips

- Creation of a business case is essential to secure management commitment
- Determine the total economic impact of all health-related costs both direct and indirect
- Establishment of a corporate strategy is essential
- Have a long-term view and commitment for the health strategy
- Have a measurement strategy to set priorities and track outcomes
- Create internal partnerships of related functional groups
- Implementation strategies should include individuals, small groups, and cultural aspects
- Efforts must align to company priorities or they will not be supported
- Consider involvement of labor organisations in the strategy and implementation
- Insure confidentiality of all personal health data by meeting any government requirements
- One size does not fit all, and program/services design and implementation must be culturally sensitive
- Develop and adhere to a clearly documented operating discipline that is supported by all applicable functions within the organisation

Source: Dr Catherine Baase, global director of health services, The Dow Chemical Company
This year’s Safety Conference – presented by the Safety Institute of Australia at the Sydney Showground in late October – has been “a huge success”, according to Tony Mitchell, the SIA Safety Conference Sydney 2010 event coordinator, and ACT representative from the Conference Organising Committee.

With more than 350 delegates, Mitchell said the keynote addresses were very well received. On day one, General Peter Cosgrove AC MC (retired) provided a captivating address on his experiences leading safety in his numerous roles at all levels of command, on operations overseas, in Australia and in disaster areas.

Cosgrove said organisational leaders should make their subordinate leaders’ jobs depend on helping to build a culture of safety, as preservation of one’s workforce as a leader is fundamentally important.

Also on day one, Captain Terry Vickers, executive director of Skytraders, spoke about Antarctic operations and managing safety from afar. Vickers observed that Antarctic operations present many challenges – not the least is the ever present risk of the background environment – and as such, good risk management is an essential part of a robust safety management system.

Barry Silburn, national president of the SIA, said Vickers’ session was about risk management at the highest level. “The role of senior management in the risk assessments for the air services to the Antarctic bases was very well received,” Silburn said.

On day two, Darren Flanagan – “The Gun behind the Beaconsfield Mine Rescue” – provided “one of the most emotional addresses I have ever seen”, said Mitchell.

“There was not a dry eye in the room as Darren recalled his part in the Beaconsfield rescue – from his hesitation to
leave his warm home in Nowra in the early hours of the morning, to his personal communications with Todd Russell and Brant Webb as he detonated a rock cave to rescue them, and finally the rescue.”

Flanagan shared his every emotion with the conference, according to Mitchell, who recommended every safety practitioner hear Flanagan’s presentation.

Silburn agreed that a highlight of the conference was Flanagan’s presentation. “He spoke with conviction, delivering a message to us all not to give up when lives are at risk,” said Silburn.

Also on the second day, the 2010 safe odyssey presentations were a unique way of presenting activities of occupational hygienists and their role in the overall OHS operations, according to Silburn. “The discussions were well received from Terry Gorman [occupational hygienist at 3M], Peter Knott [senior occupational hygienist at 3M Australia] and Gordon Cadzow [secretary of the Fall Protection Manufacturers Association],” he said.

On the third day of the conference, Dr Ian Gardner, senior physician in occupational and environmental medicine from the Defence Centre for Occupational Health, spoke candidly about the emerging research on individual genetic predispositions as they relate to “safe” levels of exposure to many chemicals and physical agents.

“Gardner’s address provided a number of ground breaking revelations for the audience and provoked many questions,” said Mitchell, who added that feedback from conference delegates has been very positive both on the program and on the quality of speakers.

The Safety Conference Organising Committee has commenced work on next year’s conference to be conducted in Sydney from 25 to 27 October 2011. “The Committee has the unenviable challenge of making the program of speakers and topics bigger and better next year,” said Mitchell.

Standing room only at The Safety Show
Running concurrently to the Safety Conference was The Safety Show, Australia’s largest workplace health and safety trade show.
In the midst of uncertainty surrounding workplace safety laws, there was standing room only in the free workshops at The Safety Show. Large crowds attended information sessions held by Safe Work Australia and law firm Norton Rose on harmonisation of the occupational health and safety laws.

Attendees were also treated to a preview of the draft model work health and safety regulations and priority model codes of practice and invited to make comment when they are released towards the end of the year.

Workshops from The Safety Show’s principal sponsor, WorkCover NSW, offered specialised advice for the building and construction, health and community services, manufacturing, small business, and transport and storage sectors.

Visitors from the transport and storage sector were particularly impressed with skilled performances at the national forklift championships held at Sydney Materials Handling, the show dedicated to lift, shift and load that ran concurrently with The Safety Show.

The 2009 male champion, Mark Gray from Woolworths, successfully defended his title and another Woolworths employee, Pamela Windsor, was crowned champion female.

The action was not limited to the championship contenders. Visitors to The Safety Show and Sydney Materials Handling with valid forklift licences on Wednesday competed for prizes in a ten-pin bowling novelty event.

The popularity of the events was matched by the drawing power of more than 300 specialist OHS exhibitors. Some of the more unusual included Airstar Australia’s portable glare-free balloon lights, the remote-controlled Dugless Conveyor Spillage Cleaning Units capable of recovering 300 tons of ore in just 12 hours, and even the automatic thatsmyspot.com.au parking barrier and lock.

The Safety Show and Sydney Materials Handling will return to the Sydney Showground from 25 to 27 October next year.

“He spoke with conviction, delivering a message to us all not to give up when lives are at risk”

Barry Silbern, national president, SIA
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