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## **LSA Safety Alert 02-2015: HOW SAFE IS YOUR WORKPLACE?**

LSA Safety Alert 02-2015: HOW SAFE IS YOUR WORKPLACE? Start planning for safety discussions for your workplace. WorkSafe is encouraging employers and workers to a new public awareness campaign which began last week to help prevent injuries with safe work environments – More info: [www.bit.ly/1JOnPzh](http://www.bit.ly/1JOnPzh)

*The following information is adapted from Worksafe Australia's document 'Consultation advice for Managers' and examines the questions that should be asked by management in compliance with regulations around keeping a safe workplace.*

### **Consultation**

#### **Why do you need to consult?**

Because many decisions you make can have health and safety consequences for your workers.

Your workers are affected by your health and safety decisions. They can often see things that you may overlook, and provide suggestions about solving health and safety problems and reducing injuries. This can lead to increased savings and improved productivity for your business.

For example, introducing a new chemical or changing work tasks can create new safety risks, and your workers can help you identify these risks and decide what to do to minimise them. Involving your workers in this process will save you unnecessary expense and downtime.

As well as being a good idea, consultation duties apply under Victorian health and safety laws.

You should share work health and safety information with your workers, and get them to contribute to the decision making process. You should always be alert to hazards that can cause harm, but through consultation, you will become more aware of hazards and work health and safety issues experienced by your workers. Involve them in addressing potential problems and advise them of the outcome before they escalate and affect your business.

#### **What does good consultation look like?**

You have agreed consultation arrangements in place to discuss safety issues — and they work effectively.

Your workers and Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) are always involved in safety decisions and developing safety procedures.

Your workers' views about safety are always taken into account and are genuinely valued.

#### **How can I be sure I'm doing these things effectively?**

Develop, agree and implement consultation arrangements to discuss safety issues, and then regularly review them to ensure they are working effectively.

Employers must consult with workers when making decisions about the consultation arrangements regarding health and safety in the workplace.

A number of arrangements are possible. For example:

- Your workers can elect a Health and Safety Representative (HSR) to represent a designated work group and raise health and safety issues;
- You can establish a Health and Safety Committee (HSC); or
- You can make other arrangements that are acceptable to your workers.

Be flexible in your approach. You don't need to organise special safety meetings — you can simply discuss safety issues during your regular workplace meetings or toolbox talks.

Make sure your consultation arrangements capture all work health and safety issues and views, as well as all your workers. For example, consider shift workers, remote workers, trainees and apprentices, volunteers, people with disabilities, and other issues, such as language, literacy, gender and age.

Always involve your workers in safety decisions and developing procedures.

Your agreed consultation arrangements should be recorded and displayed in the workplace. If you have HSRs, you are required to make their names readily accessible to workers and include them in all consultation. You should display an up-to-date list with the names and contact details of HSRs and anyone else in your workplace with a health and safety role, and let workers know they may be contacted to discuss OHS issues.

You should review your consultation arrangements periodically with your workers to ensure they are still working effectively.

There are many ways to encourage workers to participate in health and safety. You could:

- Make safety a priority. Discuss safety issues at the beginning of workplace meetings when your workers are fresh and alert, rather than at the end of a shift.
- Listen to your workers' feedback when making safety decisions. If your decisions are contrary to their views, explain why. Ultimately, it is your responsibility to determine the most appropriate action.
- Train all your workers — particularly supervisors and HSRs — in OHS consultation procedures.
- Encourage your workers to contribute to broader issues, such as workplace design and organisation of work.
- Give positive feedback to your workers. Let them know why their suggestions are important, how they are helpful and if/when they will be acted upon. If safety issues are taking a little longer to resolve and further investigation is required, give ongoing feedback so that workers know that the issue is still being resolved.
- Make sure that safety is discussed at senior management levels, and that this information is known by workers.

Value the views of workers and take them into account when making safety decisions.

Effective consultation is more than just handing out papers or simply listening to the views of your workers — you should always value and act upon your workers' ideas. Most workers want a productive and safe workplace, but may be discouraged from getting involved by the consultation process.

To ensure the views of your workers are taken into account and valued, you should:

- Implement consistent and inclusive consultation processes. Conducting ad hoc safety meetings may send the message that consultation and safety issues are relatively unimportant.
- Inform your workers of any plans that could affect their health and safety during workplace meetings. For example, plans to purchase new equipment, change work tasks or re-model the workplace. Before making a decision, seek their views on potential safety issues.
- Provide an agenda before workplace meetings. Ask workers to contribute any matters of interest. Discuss their suggestions for solutions to problems.
- If an HSR has been elected, consult with them about any safety issues or proposed decisions that may affect the safety of their designated work group and the workplace as a whole. Before making any decisions, allow them time to inform other workers and provide feedback.
- Keep records of significant safety decisions to demonstrate your commitment to safety. It should reinforce the actions to be taken, outline who is responsible for undertaking them, and indicate when they need to be completed.
- Record your consultation arrangements and display them in the workplace to demonstrate your commitment to safety.

When talking about safety issues with workers, try to reach an agreement — but remember, that responsibility ultimately rests with you.

Remember, safety is never finished. Workplaces that are serious about safety are serious about always improving.

You can maintain your commitment to consultation by:

- Ensuring that senior management are part of the consultation process and that they actively seek to ensure consultation is occurring in the workplace.
- Reviewing your consultation arrangements regularly with your workers to ensure the arrangements are working effectively.
- Encouraging your workers to contribute to broader issues such as workplace design and organisation of work.
- Ensuring your vulnerable workers (e.g. young workers, those with a disability, language or literacy difficulties) are represented in the consultation process and understand the safe work procedures, reporting measures and training systems.