



Planning for WHS management

The beginning of the year – whether a calendar year or financial – is a good time to take stock for workplace health and safety and decide on a WHS plan for the coming year, as explained by Jo Kitney, Director - Kitney Occupational Health and Safety.

Similar to other aspects of business management, planning for health and safety is essential for success – to ensure that decisions made, actions taken and resources spent achieve the outcome needed. Planning will ensure that workplace health and safety positively contributes to business success. A further benefit is the “process” of working together to understand needs and agree actions, which, when done well, can be as valuable the actual plans themselves.

With changing obligations for health and safety, due diligence requirements for officers, new technologies, increasing knowledge of hazard management and economic constraints, employers are continually challenged to safeguard health and safety. Although there is no ‘one size fits all’ for health and safety, there are common elements to planning and in managing health and safety risks in metal manufacturing.

Planning for workplace health and safety

To be truly effective, planning takes place at differing levels – at the board level and senior management as well as operational and local management.

Board and senior management planning addresses ‘higher level’ business or organisational risks and tends to take a longer term view through priorities, strategies, goal setting, key performance indicators and collaborative projects, as well as tackling ‘hot spots’ that require urgent intervention and management support.

The level and extent of this higher level planning process will depend on the size and complexity of an organisation, its business and operations, health and safety risks and obligations and culture, as well as existing health and safety arrangement, resource and management commitment.

This higher level planning sits well within an organisation’s planning cycle, particularly when linked to the budget process and planning. High level planning and senior management support will strongly influence safety culture and safety behaviors across a business.

Operational and local plans for workplace health and safety can draw from the higher level organisational strategy and plan as well as focusing on the health and safety needs of the particular work area, department or activity. These plans will usually contain more detailed actions to address key areas of need, often identified through a health and safety review, audit or risk assessment, and work well when agreed and monitored through an organisation’s workplace health and safety committee and in consultation with workers and their representatives.

Health and safety in metal manufacturing

Although every workplace is different, health and safety risks that are likely to be common to metal manufacturers include electricity, noise, manual tasks, hazardous substances, plant and equipment, as well as slips, trips and falls, access and housekeeping. Specific hazards may include welding, nanotechnology, forklift trucks and cranes as well as labour hire and contractors.

Other considerations could include the use of personal protective equipment, fatigue, fitness for work, alcohol and drugs and ‘hot spots’ identified through hazard and incident reports and workers compensation claims.

With changing obligations for health and safety, due diligence requirements for officers, new technologies, increasing knowledge of hazard management and economic constraints, employers are continually challenged to safeguard health and safety.

It’s important that hazards and risks are understood and actions being taken to manage these. This can be achieved by finding what is unsafe or unhealthy in the workplace, who may be harmed and how, understanding what the work health and safety legislation requires, what is highest risk and needs to be fixed first and how to go about fixing it.

The law for health and safety involves general health and safety obligations under the relevant state or territories health and safety act and regulations as well as other applicable legislation (such as the electrical safety act) and standards laid down within codes of practice.

Under the new Work Health and Safety Act 2011, codes of practice are admissible within a court of law and should be used as a guide for the standards expected for health and safety management. Where legislation does not stipulate a specific control measure, such as for manual handling, then the requirement for risk management laid down within the work health and safety act would apply.

Actions should be listed within a health and safety action plan, clearly stating what will happen, time frames, who’ll be responsible and, if needed, the resources needed for actions to happen. Any plan should be regularly monitored to ensure it doesn’t become a ‘paper exercise’ and that the hazard or risk is managed and problems are fixed and won’t happen again.

Actions for health and safety management may be direct actions to address hazards, such as repairing a piece of plant or equipment and putting in place guarding or controls, as well as proactive and ongoing steps such as regular maintenance of equipment, induction, training and safety gear.

It’s important to understand the actions needed to meet obligations and manage hazards and risks, list these within an action plan, involve all those needed to make a difference, and make time throughout the coming year to ensure that the actions being taken are achieving the outcome needed and positively contributing to business success.

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