

# Member Presentation 'Psychosocial Hazards'

# Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today and pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

We also extend that respect to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who are with us today.

# Psychosocial Hazards

SafeWork Australia and Victoria's WorkSafe have proposed new regulations regarding employers' responsibility to be proactive in managing the factors that exacerbate stress and psychological ill-health in the workplace.

“[The regulations] formalise obligations that are generally recognised to exist already. That is, employers need to have as much regard to mental health hazards as they would to hazards that risk physical health.

It's expected that employer responsibilities once thought to be a 'nice-to-have' are will likely be embedded into law.

“It will heighten the potential liability of employers under work health and safety laws if they don't take action to protect and safeguard the mental wellbeing of the people that are working for them.

For example, a large organisation with previous instances of bullying behaviour that fails to have a formal system with documented procedures for reporting bullying complaints will be exposed to an investigation and potential prosecution by a safety regulator.”

## What is a Psychosocial hazard?

A psychosocial hazard is anything that could cause psychological harm (i.e. harm someone's mental health). Common psychosocial hazards at work include:

- job demands
- low job control
- poor support
- lack of role clarity
- poor organisational change management
- poor organisational justice
- inadequate reward and recognition
- traumatic events or material
- remote or isolated work
- poor physical environment
- violence and aggression
- bullying
- harassment, including sexual and gender-based harassment, and
- conflict or poor workplace relationships and interactions (this may include 'exclusion' from work/social events)

## How psychosocial hazards cause harm

- Psychosocial hazards can create stress. This can cause psychological or physical harm. Stress itself is not an injury. But if workers are stressed often, over a long time, or the level of stress is high, it can cause harm.
- Psychological harm may include anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep disorders,
- Physical harm may include musculoskeletal injuries, chronic disease or fatigue related injuries. severe.

## Psychosocial hazards may interact and combine

- Psychosocial hazards may interact or combine to create new, changed or higher risks. It is important to consider all the psychosocial hazards workers may be exposed to when managing psychosocial risks.
- Some hazards may not create psychosocial risks on their own but may do so if combined with other hazards. For example, when workloads are high the risk may increase if workers cannot take breaks or there is no one around to help. Some hazards may only create risks on their own when severe.

## Managing psychosocial risks

PCBUs must eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks so far as is reasonably practicable. This can be done by following the risk management process: (identifying, assessing, controls, review – a step-by-step approach)

- 🕒 identifying the hazards
- 🕒 assessing the associated risks
- 🕒 implementing control measures to eliminate or minimise risks, and
- 🕒 regularly reviewing control measures to ensure they remain effective.

You must do these things in consultation with your workers and any HSRs (H&S Reps) if you have them.

- A ([PCBU](#)) (person conducting a business or undertaking) must eliminate psychosocial risks, or if that is not reasonably practicable, minimise them so far as is reasonably practicable.
- The model WHS Regulations require PCBUs to have regard to all relevant matters when determining what control measures to implement. For more information on these relevant matters and meeting your WHS duties see our [Mental health page](#).

For information see the model Code of Practice: [Managing psychosocial hazards at work](#).

Figure 1. Diagram of the risk management process.



For more information see [Identifying, assessing, controlling and reviewing](#)

## Workplace Health & Safety Duties

The model WHS Regulations define a psychosocial hazard as a hazard that may cause psychological harm (whether or not it may also cause physical harm). They arise from, or relate to:

- the design or management of work
- a work environment
- plant at a workplace, or
- workplace interactions or behaviours.
- PCBUs must eliminate or minimise, so far as is reasonably practicable, the psychosocial risks that arise from psychosocial hazards. See [PCBU duties](#) for more information on these duties, including the relevant matters which a PCBU must consider when determining control measures to implement.

More information on how to manage psychosocial risks is also available at [Managing risks](#).

PCBUs must also:

- consult workers, and any HSRs, about work health and safety
- consult, cooperate and coordinate with other duty holders.
- Workers and other persons at the workplace also have duties, see [Worker and other persons duties](#).

For information on how PCBU's can meet their duties see the [model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work](#).

## Group Reflection

Read out loud the below quote and then discuss.

*“A manager’s propensity for bullying is as much a workplace hazard as a loose handrail or a faulty lift.”*

Charles Power, Partner, Holding Redlich  
[Commercial & Government Law Firm Australia | Holding Redlich](#)

Thoughts?

## Key Take Outs:

- Psychosocial hazards are often as evident/ relevant and impactful (sometimes more so) than physical hazards and have the capacity to affect your; workforces' enjoyment of work, productivity, morale, retention/attraction, [Worksafe QLD](#) insurance premiums, bottom line and reputation.
- Whilst not yet embedded into law, obligations around proactively managing psychosocial hazards are embedded within [Safework Australia](#) & will likely be introduced into Worksafe QLD in due course, thus it is highly recommended to start looking into your workplace/ workforce psychosocial hazards exposure touchpoints. It is only a matter of time until Fair Work adds this to the NES – [National Employment Standards](#) and/or [General Protections](#).
- Using the resources provided, it is suggested to convene a WHS team/committee (if you do not already have one) and add psychosocial hazards to your standing meeting agenda and hazard documentation as well as embed within your current General and/or WHS policy & procedures.

# Resources Links

[Fair work changes and new mental health safeguards: four legal changes HR needs to be across – HRM online](#)

[Psychosocial hazards | Safe Work Australia](#)

[Mental health – Resources | Safe Work Australia](#)

[Search | WorkSafe.qld.gov.au](#)

[What are the general protections? | Fair Work Commission \(fwc.gov.au\)](#)



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