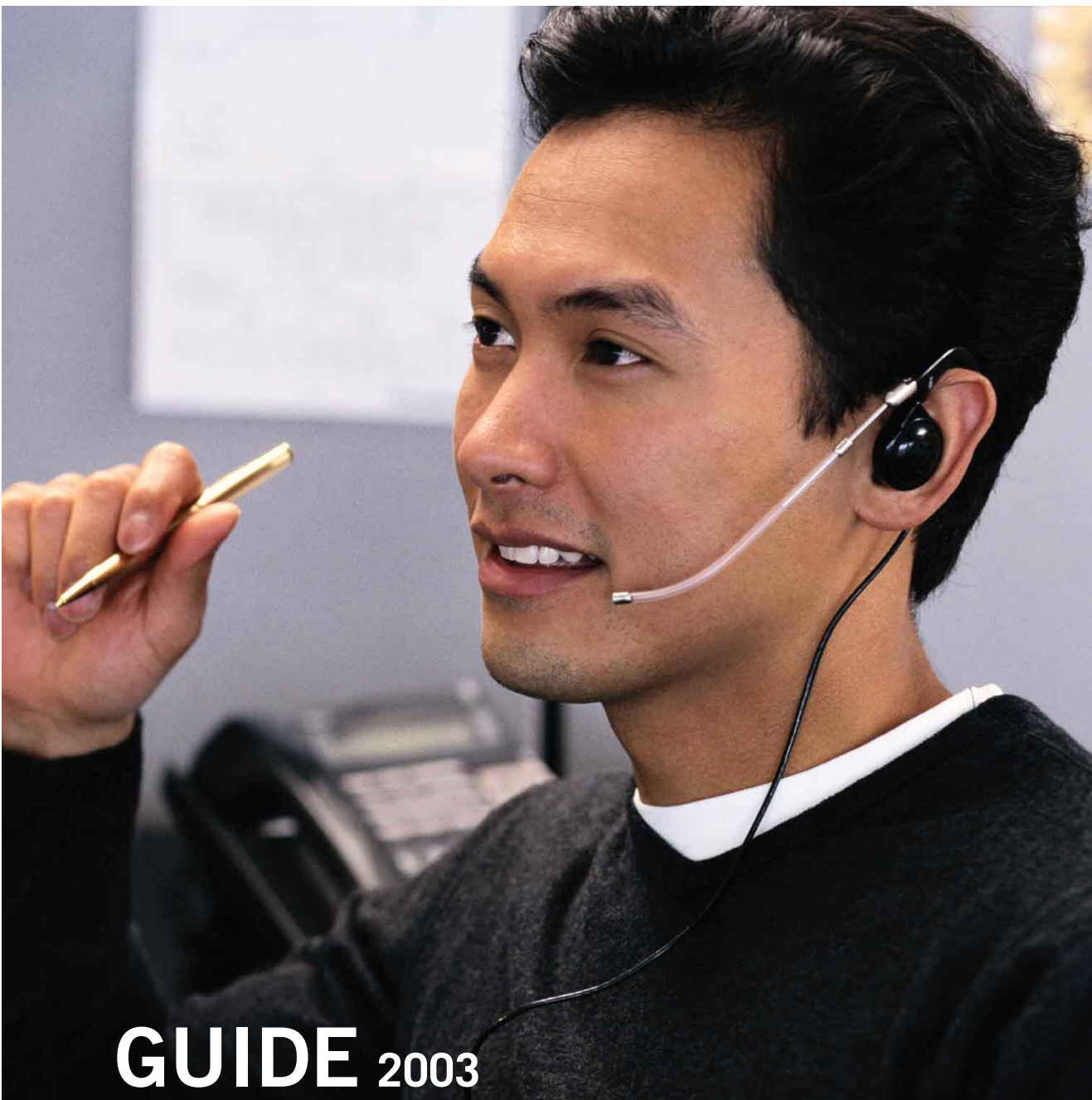


HEALTH & SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR **CALL CENTRES** IN NSW



Disclaimer

This publication contains industry recommended action or information regarding occupational health, safety, injury management and workers compensation. It includes some of your obligations under the various workers compensation and occupational health and safety legislation that WorkCover NSW administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate Acts, Regulations, Guidelines and Codes of Practice.

This publication may refer to WorkCover NSW administered legislation that has been amended or repealed. When reading this publication you should always refer to the latest laws. Information on the latest laws can be checked at www.nsw.gov.au or contact (02) 9238 0950 or 1800 463 955 (NSW country only).

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Interpretation

Legal requirements

Words such as ‘must’, ‘requires’, and ‘mandatory’ indicate legal requirements with which the relevant person, usually the employer, must comply.

Recommended practices

Words such as ‘should,’ indicate recommended courses of action. ‘May’, ‘can’ or ‘consider’ suggest a possible course of action that the duty holder should consider. However, they may choose an alternative method of achieving a safe system of work.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of the call centre industry in Australia has largely been driven by the need for organisations to adopt more cost-effective strategies for delivering services.

Call centres have a unique working environment characterised by working practices that can present hazards, and systems of work that differ from those of other computer-based office jobs.

These Guidelines were developed in response to concerns over health and safety issues in call centres. They were developed in consultation with industry stakeholders represented by WorkCover's Industry Reference Group for Business Services¹.

They are intended to:

- provide guidance on health and safety issues specific to call centres
- assist employers and employees to meet some of their occupational health and safety, workers compensation and injury management obligations.

The Guidelines outline how to:

- incorporate safety into daily operations
- improve current systems for eliminating or controlling risks
- help an ill or injured worker to get back to their job quickly and safely.

What is a Call Centre?

A 'call centre' (or 'contact centre')² is a work area or workplace specifically dedicated to the use of telephone and/or computer technology that provides value-added services to clients. It is comprised of people whose primary function is to respond to inbound and/or outbound telephone traffic.

Call centres can operate in many industries. Some are separate entities whose core function is to provide call centre services to client organisations. Others exist as a division within an organisation, undertaking call centre functions specific to that organisation's requirements. e.g. information provision, account enquiries, sales, marketing, surveys etc.

¹ The establishment of Industry Reference Groups (IRGs) by the NSW Workers Compensation Advisory Council in February 1999 is one of the major changes enacted under the *Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998*. Specific IRGs have been established, comprised of employer and employee representatives from industry. Their purpose is to develop strategies to improve workplace safety and injury management.

² The use of the term 'contact centre' is slowly becoming more widespread due to technological advancements and growing consumer demands prompting a multi-channel environment i.e. telephone, paper-based and electronic contact channels.

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

Health and Safety Legal Obligations

In NSW, health and safety of people at work is regulated by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000* (the *OHS Act 2000*) and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001* (the *OHS Regulation 2001*). These set out the legal obligations for various parties (in particular, employers and employees) in the workplace. The purpose of the legislation is to prevent injury and illness in the workplace. Legislation and other information can be downloaded from the WorkCover NSW website, www.workcover.nsw.gov.au.

Employer legal obligations

If you are an employer, you have a legal responsibility (called a 'duty of care') to ensure the health, safety and welfare of people at your workplace. This includes any employees, contractors and members of the public while they are at the workplace.

In relation to employees, the *OHS Act 2000* requires you to provide:

- a safe workplace, and safe means of entry to and exit from the workplace
- equipment, machinery or chemicals that are safe, when used properly
- a safe and healthy working environment, and safe and healthy methods and procedures (systems) for working
- adequate information, instruction, training and supervision for all workers
- adequate facilities and first aid for employees
- a process for consultation with workers
- processes for identifying hazards, assessing risks and eliminating or controlling those risks.

How do employers meet their legal obligations?

A safe workplace, and safe means of entry to and exit from the workplace

This means that you must ensure that your premises are maintained in a safe condition, including attention to such matters as:

- general maintenance of all work buildings and structures
- electrical safety
- maintenance of floors to avoid trip and slip hazards
- providing adequate working space for employees
- providing adequate lighting to allow people to move safely within the place of work, and allow safe access to and egress from the place of work (including emergency exits).

In addition, you must ensure you meet the requirements of local and state fire laws. This can be done, by initially, by conducting a fire safety assessment, and then by regularly monitoring, so that:

- passage ways, entrances and exits are kept clear and exits are easily identified by clear signage
- fire extinguishers (suitable for different types of fires) are provided, and their location and means of operation are known to all employees
- evacuation procedures are known to all employees and emergency drills are carried out on a regular basis.

Employers should contact their local and state fire authorities for further information on this.

Equipment, machinery or chemicals that are safe, when used properly

Employers must make sure that all necessary equipment, machinery and chemicals at the workplace are provided and maintained in a safe condition.

You must ensure that people in your workplace have received sufficient information, training, instruction and supervision on the safe use, handling, and storage of equipment, machinery and chemicals.

In a call centre, this requirement would apply to equipment such as:

- headsets
- computer equipment
- furniture
- chemicals that may be used for cleaning headsets and computer monitors.

A safe and healthy working environment, and safe and healthy methods and procedures (systems) for working

To provide a safe working environment, a variety of measures need to be taken, including:

- well-designed workstations and equipment
- adequate lighting and glare prevention
- adequate ventilation
- noise control
- adequate staffing and supervision for the task
- reasonable length shifts, with adequate rest breaks for employees.

You should also consider implementing appropriate measures to eliminate or control the risk of violence in the workplace, or the risk of other potential work-related injuries and illnesses.

Employers must ensure that tasks are done safely, in a way that will not cause harm to anyone. This can be addressed by developing policies and safe work procedures as part of an overall system to manage risks at the workplace.

This system needs to include identifying hazards, assessing risks and eliminating or (if this is not possible) controlling risks. Further information on this is provided below and on page 15, 'Managing Health and Safety'.

Adequate information, instruction, training and supervision for all workers

The provision of adequate information, instruction, training and supervision is critical in ensuring the health and safety of employees. To achieve this, employers must ensure that:

- new employees receive induction training on how occupational health and safety (OHS) is managed in their workplace, including:
 - how they report hazards to management
 - specific health and safety procedures (ie. systems of work) relevant to the employee
 - how they can access any other relevant health and safety information.
- any one who may be exposed to a health and safety risk at the workplace is informed of the risk and provided with the information, instruction and training necessary to ensure the person's health and safety
- people who have responsibilities for managing workplace health and safety risks, or providing health and safety information, are provided with all the available information to enable them to fulfil those responsibilities
- employees are provided with reasonable supervision by a competent person.

As an employer, you should review your training programs and consider developing a training policy³. You should also consult with employees to determine their training needs and provide refresher training, as needed, to ensure that workers perform their duties in a safe manner.

Manufacturers, suppliers, and designers of equipment and chemicals also have obligations under OHS legislation. They must provide necessary information to employers to enable them to use the products safely. Employers must obtain this information to identify any potential hazards and assess any risks associated with the equipment or chemicals. You must make informed decisions, in consultation with your employees, regarding the appropriate means of eliminating or controlling those risks.

Adequate facilities and first aid for employees

Certain facilities, also known as 'workplace amenities', must be provided for the welfare and personal hygiene needs of employees. They include:

- safe and hygienically maintained toilets
- rest rooms for the recovery of injury or illness
- washing facilities
- eating areas
- drinking water.

WorkCover's *Workplace Amenities Code of Practice 2001* provides additional practical advice about the type of amenities required at workplaces.

As an employer, you must provide first aid facilities adequate for the immediate treatment of injuries and illnesses that may arise at work. To determine the nature, number and location of first aid facilities, trained first aid personnel and first aid kits that are needed, you must consider the location and nature of the work, and the number of employees. First aid kits should be adequately maintained and stored in a central, accessible and convenient location known to all employees. A person should be appointed to be in charge of each first aid kit. However, if there are more than 25 employees in your workplace, the first aid kit must be under the control of trained first aid personnel.

Chapter 2 (Clause 20) of the *OHS Regulation 2001* and WorkCover's *Guide to First Aid in the Workplace* provide further information about employers' first aid obligations, setting out minimum requirements for first aid kits and trained first aid personnel.

A process for consultation with workers

In the context of NSW OHS legislation, consultation means an employer must share relevant information with employees and provide the opportunity for employees to express their views, ensuring these views are taken into account. This is critical to successfully managing workplace health and safety - generally, the people doing the job are in the best position to offer advice on the hazards they may encounter and ways to work safely. For this reason, OHS legislation requires employers to consult with their employees, to enable the employees to contribute to decisions affecting their health, safety and welfare at work.

You may consult with employees through any one or more of the following:

- a) establishing an OHS committee (where there are 20 or more employees and a majority of those employees request it, or if directed by WorkCover)
- b) through OHS representative(s) elected by employees

³ See page 15 on 'Managing Health and Safety' of these Guidelines for more information on developing policies.

c) through other arrangements agreed by the employer and employees. This can involve the employees' relevant trade union.

You must ensure that each member of an OHS committee and each OHS representative undertake a course of training in accordance with the *OHS Regulation 2001* (Chapter 3, Clause 31).

Consultation must occur when:

- changes that may affect health, safety or welfare are proposed to premises, work methods/procedures, work systems, equipment or substances
- risks to health and safety are assessed or reviewed
- decisions are to be made about the measures to be taken to eliminate or control those risks
- procedures for monitoring those risks are introduced or altered
- decisions are to be made about the adequacy of facilities for the welfare of employees
- decisions are made about the procedures for consultation
- any other matter arises for which the OHS Regulation requires consultation.

Further guidance on consultation is provided in WorkCover's *OHS Consultation Code of Practice 2001*, Sections 13-15 of the *OHS Act 2000* and Chapter 3 of the *OHS Regulation 2001*.

Processes for identifying hazards, assessing risks and eliminating or controlling risks

A *hazard* is anything (including work practices or procedures) that has the potential to harm the health or safety of a person. A *risk* is the likelihood and severity of any harm that can arise from a hazard.

The process of identifying hazards, assessing the risks that can arise from those hazards, and eliminating or controlling the risks is known as '*risk management*'. This process is a repetitious four-step cycle:

1. Find out what can harm people in the workplace (*identify hazards*).
2. Determine how seriously the hazard can harm someone and how likely it is to occur (*assess risks*).
3. Do something about it to ensure people are not harmed (*eliminate or control risks*).
4. Regularly check that your solution is working, and implement improvements if needed (*monitor and review*).



OHS legislation requires that, in consultation with employees, employers must 'take reasonable care to' identify any foreseeable hazards at the workplace that may harm someone (Clause 9, Chapter 2, *OHS Regulation 2001*). Clause 11, Chapter 2 of the *OHS Regulation 2001* states that employers must 'eliminate any reasonably foreseeable risk to health or safety...'.

Risk management must be undertaken:

- before setting up and using a workplace
- when planning for how work is to be carried out (eg. when developing *procedures*⁴)
- before and after purchasing, installing, or commissioning equipment, machinery, or appliances (ie. *plant*⁵) to be used in the workplace
- whenever changes are made to the:
 - workplace
 - system or method of work
 - equipment, machinery or appliance
 - chemicals used
- whenever new or additional information from an authoritative source regarding the work premises and environment, equipment, machinery or appliance, chemicals or work procedures becomes available.

By implementing a risk management approach to managing workplace safety, you can develop step-by-step procedures for all workplace tasks, and ensure the ongoing identification of hazards and control of risks within your workplace. The *Employer Safety Checklist for Call Centres* (Appendix 1) provides a useful tool for identifying hazards.

More information on OHS risk management may be found in Appendices 2 and 3 of these Guidelines, WorkCover's *Risk Management at Work Guide 2001* and the *Risk Assessment Code of Practice 2001*.

Employee legal obligations

While the primary responsibility for making sure that work activities are safe lies with the employer/business operator, everyone has a role to play in creating a safe workplace and in working together to keep it that way. The *OHS Act 2000* (Sections 20 and 21) sets out specific responsibilities for employees, stating that you must:

- take reasonable care for the health and safety of others
- cooperate with employers in matters of health and safety
- not interfere with, or misuse anything, provided that ensures the health, safety and welfare of people at the workplace.

How do employees meet their legal obligations?

Employees can satisfy their legal obligations by:

- following reasonable instructions, policies, procedures and correctly using equipment provided by your employer to protect your health and safety and that of others in the workplace
- identifying and reporting any matter to your employer, supervisor, OHS representative or OHS committee that, to your knowledge, may affect the your employer's capacity to comply with their obligations under OHS legislation
- being involved in discussions to resolve OHS issues
- not interfering with, or removing, any safety guards, safety devices or protective equipment provided by your employer.

⁴ See Page 16 of these Guidelines for more information on developing procedures

⁵ Under the *OHS Act 2000* and *OHS Regulation 2001* the term "plant" is used to include any machinery, equipment or appliance.

Workers Compensation Legal Obligations

Employers must establish effective workers compensation and injury management systems to ensure that employees who are injured or become ill in the workplace return to work safely and as soon as possible.

Employers' legal obligations for workers compensation and injury management are detailed in the *NSW Workers Compensation Act 1987 (WC Act 1987)* and the *NSW Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998 (WIM&WC Act 1998)*.

The *WC Act 1987* requires all employers (unless they are a licensed self-insurer) to have a current workers compensation policy. Policies can be taken out with most major insurers. Visit WorkCover's website (www.workcover.nsw.gov.au) or contact the WorkCover Assistance Service on 13 10 50 for a list of insurers.

In the event of a workplace injury or illness, a workers compensation policy provides the worker with:

- weekly benefits
- medical and hospital expenses
- rehabilitation services
- certain personal items (eg. clothing, spectacles, if damaged in a work-related accident)
- a lump sum payment for permanent impairment.

If a business hires contractors, the employer should check that the contractors have their own current workers compensation policy covering themselves and all their workers. The employer should confirm this by requesting a copy of the contractor's Certificate of Currency. Where a business does not engage workers or 'deemed' workers, a minimum premium policy (currently costing \$120 per year) can be obtained in case there are claims. Employers should contact their insurance company or WorkCover for further clarification.

Employer legal obligations

As an employer, you must:

- **keep correct records** of all wages for at least seven years
- **have a current workers compensation insurance policy** covering all workers
- **keep a Register of Injuries** – this is a formal record of any injuries or illnesses suffered by workers whether or not they result in a workers compensation claim. The register can provide useful information for identifying workplace hazards when undertaking risk assessments
- **post a summary of the *Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998* in the workplace** – this reinforces for employees what to do if they have an injury, and identifies the employer's workers compensation insurer
- **establish and display a return-to-work program** – this outlines the employers' return-to-work policy and the procedures to be followed if a worker is injured or becomes ill. It must be consistent with the insurance company's injury management program, and must be developed in consultation with employees and regularly reviewed. This applies to Category 1 employers only (ie. employers whose base premium exceeds \$50,000). Category 2 employers (ie. employer's whose base premium is \$50,000 or less) may adopt WorkCover's standard return-to-work program and may display it, or make it available to workers who ask for it.
- **forward the workers compensation claim form to your insurance company** within seven days if you receive a claim form from an injured worker – you must also include any other documentation relating to the claim
- **pass on any compensation received from the insurer to the person entitled to the compensation** as soon as practicable.

Injury Management Legal Obligations

Employers' legal obligations for workers compensation and injury management are detailed in the *NSW Workers Compensation Act 1987 (WC Act 1987)* and the *NSW Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998 (WIM&WC Act 1998)*.

The objective of injury management is to achieve a timely, safe and durable return to work for injured workers. The term 'injury management' applies to the integration of an injured worker's:

- treatment
- rehabilitation back to work
- retraining into new skills or a new job
- claims management
- employment management practices

Reforms under the *WIM&WC Act 1998*, introduced on 1 January 2002, simplify the claims process to facilitate an injured worker's return to work. Research indicates that when a worker returns to work as soon as possible following a workplace injury or illness, there will be less downtime and lost productivity, as well as a savings in claims costs (and therefore lower premiums) for employers.

An employer's workers compensation insurer must have developed an injury management program that outlines how they will assist injured workers to return to work.

An employer must develop a return-to-work program consistent with their insurer's injury management program.

The injury management program ensures that the insurer and employer have injury management systems in place before an injury/illness occurs.

An individual injury management plan is developed for every worker who has a significant injury/illness. A 'significant' injury is one that is likely to result in a worker being unable to perform their normal duties for a continuous period of seven days or more. The injury management plan ensures the worker receives prompt, appropriate medical management, and a planned and managed return to work.

If you are an employer, you must:

- **notify WorkCover of any injury or incident** where a worker will be away from normal duties for more than seven days
- **notify your insurance company within 48 hours** of becoming aware that an injured worker will be away from normal duties for more than seven days (ie. the worker has suffered a 'significant' injury) – all other injuries are to be notified within seven days
- **participate and cooperate in the establishment of an injured worker's injury management plan**
- **make suitable duties available to injured workers** who have WorkCover medical certificates that recommend such duties
- **not dismiss an injured worker because of the injury and incapacity for work within six months of the injury.**

If you are an employee, you should:

- **immediately tell your employer** if you have sustained an injury
- **record details of the injury** in the Register of Injuries
- **see your doctor to arrange treatment and get a WorkCover medical certificate** (if one is required)
- **cooperate in plans for your return to work** – there are two types of plans: one is drawn up by the insurance company and is called an injury management plan, the other is drawn up by your employer and is called a return-to-work plan

- **keep your employer informed** of your progress as you recover from injury/illness
- **return to work as soon as possible.**

Employers must develop systems to manage workers compensation and injury management to ensure legal obligations are being met.

As an employer you should implement a system for the identification and review of the causes of injuries/illnesses as a part of the injury management process, which can then be used to improve OHS in the workplace. To ensure the effective implementation of your workers compensation and injury management systems, you must provide your employees with adequate information and training on policies and procedures.

For more information on workers compensation and injury management, contact the WorkCover Assistance Service on 13 10 50.

Other Obligations

Electrical issues

Chapter 4, Clause 40 and 41, of the *OHS Regulation 2001* contains specific requirements for electrical installations and equipment in the workplace. Employers must ensure that all electrical installations and equipment are safe to use and regularly inspected, tested, maintained, and repaired or replaced if unsafe for use. This requirement covers, but is not limited to, equipment such as:

- computer equipment
- faxes
- photocopiers
- extension leads
- kitchen appliances.

Risks can arise from the presence of electrical cables and cords in work areas. These should be effectively addressed. A cable/cord management strategy can help prevent slips, trips and falls and electrical risks that may arise as a result of the placement of those cables/cords.

All electrical installation work should be carried out in accordance with the Standard *AS/NZS 3000:2000 Electrical installations* (known as the Australian/New Zealand Wiring Rules). Further information on the requirements for inspecting and testing electrical equipment is available in the Australian Standard *AS 3760:2000 In-service safety inspections and testing of electrical equipment*. Australian Standards are available by contacting Standards Australia on 1300 654 646.

Security

Adequate provision must be made to ensure the safety of employees and others in the workplace, including security when they are entering or leaving the workplace. Given that many call centres operate outside normal (ie. daytime) business hours, you may consider a secure carpark and/or an escorted security service as a means of controlling security risks. Also consider restricting access to workplace buildings and the call centre itself.

If an employee's job requires the handling of cash, measures should be implemented to address the security risks. WorkCover's guide, *Armed Hold-ups and Cash Handling*, provides guidance in this area.

Violence in the workplace

Violence includes:

- verbal abuse (in person or over the telephone)
- stalking
- harassment
- threats
- ganging up/bullying/intimidation
- physical or sexual assault
- armed robbery
- malicious damage to the property of staff, customers or the business.

Violence may arise in the course of working with clients, or even from co-workers or management. A person's response to a violent act is generally unique to the individual's life experiences, coping skills and personality.

Chapter 2, Clause 9(2) (j) of the *OHS Regulation 2001* places obligations on employers to identify and eliminate potentially abusive situations, violence or intimidation from their workplace, regardless of the source.

WorkCover's *Violence in the Workplace Guide 2002* and *Managing Workplace Violence in the Finance Sector* provide further information on this issue.

Smoking in the workplace

Passive smoking means breathing in environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), including the smoke of other people. Passive smoking is recognised as a significant health hazard and the majority of workplaces in NSW have now adopted smoke-free policies. Certain designated public places, and public places that are also workplaces, are subject to the provisions of the *Smoke-free Environment Act 2000* and must be kept smoke-free.

Further information on the *Smoke-free Environment Act 2000* can be obtained from the Department of Health, Tobacco and Health Unit on (02) 9391 9111.

To control ETS, smoking should be eliminated from all indoor areas.

Employers should:

- develop a written non-smoking policy in consultation with employees
- designate indoor areas as non-smoking
- inform all staff through meetings, training, memos and notice boards
- post signs using easily recognised symbols, clearly indicating to staff and the public that smoking is not permitted in indoor areas.

The WorkCover publication, *Passive Smoking-Policy and Control 2000* provides further information on smoking in the workplace.

MANAGING HEALTH AND SAFETY

The most effective means of ensuring a safe workplace is to manage health and safety issues in a systematic (ie. organised and logical) way. A good starting point is the development of formal policies and procedures that clearly specify how health and safety will be managed at your workplace.

Policies set out your organisation's commitment to a safe workplace and define the responsibilities of various parties in relation to specific health and safety matters.

Procedures specify what, how and when specific matters should be done to ensure the policy on that matter is adhered to.

Written policies and procedures should be developed in consultation with employees, and made available to everyone. Employers must provide employees with the necessary information, training and supervision to ensure they know their responsibilities and enable them to follow procedures to keep them safe.

Developing an OHS Policy

Initially, find out the OHS requirements for your workplace. Then, in consultation with staff, decide what is expected of people at each level of the organisation, to ensure a safe and healthy workplace. Identify what is needed by each group to meet these expectations.

Clearly outlining responsibilities and expectations will form the basis of your OHS policy. See Appendix 4 for a sample OHS policy and a step-by-step Guide to Developing an OHS Policy. If you have an OHS policy, use this guide to review it.

In developing your OHS policy, consider the following broad responsibilities that may apply in your workplace.

Employer OHS responsibilities include:

- ensuring the workforce complies with OHS legal requirements
- providing a safe workplace and safe ways of working
- providing ways for employees to be informed about and consulted on health and safety issues at work
- ensuring that all documents related to safe work procedures are kept up-to-date
- consulting with workers on safety matters
- providing the resources necessary to allow everyone in the organisation to comply with their health and safety responsibilities.

Supervisor OHS responsibilities include:

- managing day-to-day management of health and safety issues
- ensuring new employees receive adequate information, training and supervision to enable them to work safely
- ensuring workers follow safety rules and use protective equipment
- consulting with workers on safety matters
- providing safety and protective equipment.

Employee OHS responsibilities include:

- following reasonable instructions, policies and procedures, and using protective equipment while at work
- identifying and reporting any workplace incidents or hazards to the employer, supervisor, OHS representative or OHS committee

- being involved in discussions concerning OHS issues
- not interfering with, or removing, any safety guards, safety devices or protective equipment provided by the employer.

Contractors and visitors

- Clearly state what you expect of any contractors and visitors to the workplace. In general, this would include following any reasonable instructions and advice about their safety while in your workplace.

The essence of your OHS policy is a written translation of your expectations and responsibilities.

Once the OHS policy has been developed/reviewed, make it available to your employees for review, ensure they have agreed to it, and have it signed by both the employer and employee representative. Once it has been agreed to, display it where most employees can see it, eg. in the staff room or lunchroom.

You should consider developing policies for other workplace issues, such as first aid, emergency and evacuation procedures, violence and aggression, and smoking.

Developing OHS Procedures

Procedures provide guidance on how policies are to be implemented, what needs to be done, when it needs to be done and by whom. OHS procedures are the steps that need to be followed to maintain a safe workplace. They take into account the hazards that have been identified and the measures that are to be taken to control the risks arising from those hazards.

Examine your workplace and identify those activities involving safety issues that may require procedures.

Workplace activities that may require procedures include:

Work tasks

Employees may be working with equipment or chemicals that can place them at risk. They may also be exposed to manual handling tasks.

Purchasing

Equipment or substances purchased for use in the workplace may introduce hazards.

Reporting OHS problems

As soon as a potential safety problem is identified it should be reported so it can be fixed before causing harm.

Investigating accidents

If something does go wrong it should be investigated promptly, and procedures should be reviewed and improved to ensure it does not happen again.

Managing injuries

If someone becomes injured or ill because of work, procedures should be in place to assist them to return to work safely, as soon as possible.

Emergency procedures

The workplace should have a plan for what to do in the event of a fire or other emergency.

Contractors

Address the safety of contractors who are working in the workplace. Their activities may place other workers and themselves at risk.

Two of the key workplace activities that can raise significant health and safety issues are work tasks and purchasing. Further information on developing OHS procedures for these activities is outlined in Appendices 5 and 6.

Once you have identified any workplace activities that may involve safety issues, consult with your employees. Use the risk management process in Appendix 2. This will assist in developing effective safe work procedures that incorporate specific measures to ensure the health and safety of your workers.

Reviewing the Safety System

Once your policies and procedures have been developed, review the steps that have been taken to manage health and safety in your workplace. Your work processes, employees, and the workplace itself may change over time, as may the risks to which employees may be exposed. Also, from time to time, health and safety laws may change. Therefore, continually review your health and safety management system to ensure it addresses changing workplace conditions and legislative requirements.

POTENTIAL HAZARDS IN CALL CENTRES

Any workplace may present hazards to a worker's physical and/or psychological health and safety. Although these Guidelines do not address every hazard within call centres, they provide a framework for identifying and managing workplace hazards. Each workplace may present hazards unique to that workplace.

The following list, developed through consultation with industry and a review of call centre literature, reflects the nature of the work carried out by call centre operators, the work environment of call centres, and workers compensation claims data⁶. The list identifies factors that may give rise to hazards in the workplace, due to poor design or other causes. They include:

- workstation design (including its relationship to poor posture)
- working space
- lighting
- ventilation
- telephone headset use
- background noise
- manual handling tasks (including repetitive keyboard tasks)
- psychological environment.

Use the risk management process outlined in Appendix 2 to identify the hazards relevant to your call centre, then implement appropriate controls to manage the potential risks.

Physical Environment

Workstations

Providing employees with ergonomically designed and correctly adjusted workstation furniture/equipment can reduce the risk of a range of occupational injuries caused by overuse, poor posture and poor lighting. You should also provide appropriate training in the correct use of ergonomic workstation equipment and furniture.

Australian Standard *AS 3590.2-1990: Screen-based workstations-Workstation Furniture*, provides guidance in correct set-up of workstations that can be applied to call centre employees. The diagram below is an example of correct workstation set-up.

⁶ Major claims data was used from last two years available (1999/2000 to 2000/2001) based on occupations that most closely correlated with call centre operators.

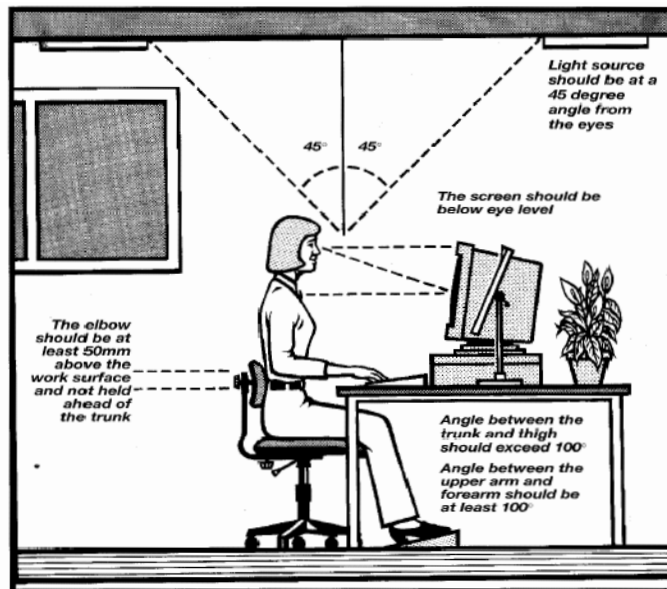


Diagram 1 Correct workstation set-up for keyboard operator

Chairs

Call centre operators should have ergonomic chairs that are adjustable, comfortable and have good back support.

Correctly adjusted chairs help the worker to:

- maintain correct body posture
- maintain good blood circulation
- reduce muscular effort
- decrease pressure on a their back.

Chairs should:

- swivel
- have a five-leg star base for stability
- have breathable fabric on the seat
- have a rounded front edge
- have adjustable seat height and backrest for lumbar support.

If your workers are employed in shift-work and, as a result, with the result that chairs are used 24-hours per day and up to seven days per week, the chairs need to be of robust construction, accommodate all potential users, and provide a high level of comfort and good postural support – without frequent maintenance.

Desks

Consider adjustable desk heights to accommodate people of various heights who may share workstations, such as shift workers. If the height adjustment mechanism on the desk is mechanical, it should be located within easy reach of the operator. In call centres, where more than one worker uses the desk during the course of a shift (hot-desking), consider electronic adjustment.

The size of the desk or workbench must be sufficient for all equipment, task materials/references and the tasks the worker performs.

All equipment and task materials on or around the desk should be within comfortable reach. There should be no over-reaching or unnecessary twisting of any part of the body. The diagram below outlines the correct work-surface layout, with the most frequently used objects placed within easy reach.

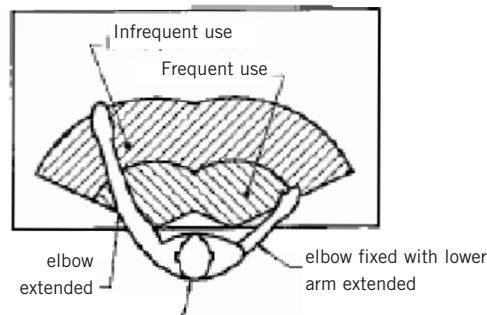


Diagram 2 Limits of reach

Other workstation equipment

Other equipment used at a workstation should be ergonomically designed and positioned. This may include:

- the computer monitor
- keyboard
- mouse
- mouse pad
- document holder.

See Diagram 1 for the correct workstation set-up.

To decrease the likelihood of an injury associated with tasks performed at a workstation, employees should:

- change posture often to minimise fatigue
- avoid awkward postures at the extremes of the joint range, especially the wrists
- avoid unnecessary swivelling in their chair, especially when attempting to reach and twist at the same time
- take frequent short rests (every hour), rather than infrequent longer rests
- not be subjected to sudden increases in workload (including keyboard work), particularly after a prolonged absence from work, or on return to work after injury/illness.

Working space

Chapter 4 of the *OHS Regulation 2001* states that employers must ensure that:

- sufficient work space is provided to allow people to work safely
- floors and surfaces are constructed and maintained to minimise the possibility of slips, trips and falls
- people are not hindered and are able to move safely around a place of work.

The WorkCover publication *Health and Safety in the Office* contains recommendations on personal workspace for office work.

Lighting

Adequate artificial and natural lighting that does not create excessive glare or reflection must also be considered to ensure the safety of people at work. Improper lighting may cause workers to adopt incorrect postures to avoid excessive glare or reflection, and/or eyestrain.

The basic rule for adequate lighting for call centre employees is that the work must be easy to see and the light comfortable to the eyes.

You should avoid workbench or desk surfaces and office fittings with reflective surfaces.

Illumination is measured in units of LUX-lumens per square metre. Recommended light levels based on Australian Standard *AS 1680.2.2-1994: Interior lighting - office and screen-based tasks* are:

- general background 160 lux
- tasks involving typing, reading, writing 320 lux

Sharp differences in illumination between adjacent areas should be avoided. Ideally, the area surrounding the work area itself should be slightly less illuminated. Light should fall from the side rather than from the front to avoid reflection on the work surface.

Ventilation

Employers must ensure that adequate ventilation and air movement is provided in indoor environments that may become hot. Further guidance on ventilation can be found in Australian Standard *AS 1668: Mechanical ventilation for acceptable indoor air quality* and *AS 1668.2-2002: The use of ventilation and air conditioning in buildings-ventilation design for indoor air contaminant control* and Chapter 4, Clause 47 and 53, of the *OHS Regulation 2001*.

Telephone headset use

Most, if not all, call centre operators use headsets to attend to inbound/outbound calls. Lightweight adjustable headsets with a volume control should be provided for call centre operators.

Headset use may present some risks to health and safety, relating to:

- noise interference
- infection control.

Noise interference

Call centre operators may hear 'crackling', distorted sounds, or customers that are difficult to hear or understand. In this situation, the operator may need to increase their concentration and listen more attentively, causing mental fatigue and increased muscle tension.

For many years, national and international literature has discussed the issue of 'acoustic shock' (or 'acoustic trauma') amongst telephone users. 'Acoustic shock' is a term given to unexpected, loud or high-pitched sounds heard through a telephone line. It may be caused by telephone faults, incorrectly dialled fax machines or, in some cases, impatient and irate customers who blow whistles directly into the telephone.

Call centres should consider ways to reduce noise levels emitted through the telephone line and have in place systems of work that enable staff to identify and report any hazards that arise. Call centre staff should be provided training on plugging in, volume control, background noise management and other hazards.

Infection control

Infection is the result of a harmful living agent (eg. bacteria, viruses etc) entering the body and multiplying. These agents can enter the body of another person through the skin, mouth, or the nose or mucous membranes. Infection can be present without any visible symptoms of illness.

Due to the close proximity of headsets to the mouth and external ear canal, it is important to prevent the spread of ear and respiratory infections among call centre operators. Sharing of headsets should be avoided, and appropriate cleaning and maintenance procedures implemented.

Background noise

In addition to the noise produced from headsets, the workplace itself can expose call centre employees to high levels of noise. Call centres generally have a partitioned, open- plan office layout to house individual workstations. Therefore, call centre operators are often exposed to noise from ringing phones, voices of fellow operators attending to calls or involved in conversations with co-workers, and noise produced by office equipment.

Call centre operators can be prone to mental fatigue and increased muscle tension as they increase their concentration and listen more attentively to customers, in an effort to cope with excessive environmental noise.

Chapter 4, Clause 49, of the *OHS Regulation 2001* requires employers to avoid exposing employees to excessive noise levels.

The prevention or minimisation of background noise is best managed when the call centre is being designed. This ensures that the workplace layout will minimise noise, and office fittings, fixtures and surfaces are noise absorbing. Noise levels of office equipment, such as photocopiers, should also be taken into account in determining their location in a call centre environment.

Manual handling tasks and keyboard work

Manual handling is any activity requiring a person to use force to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain an object.

For call centre employees, manual handling can include tasks such as moving boxes of supplies, filing, getting equipment from cupboards, and filling the photocopying machine with paper. It can also include keying tasks.

Keyboard work may expose call centre employees to the risk of musculoskeletal injury (ie. overuse of soft tissue resulting in injuries to the hands, wrists, shoulders, neck and back⁷) as a result of awkward, static and/or repetitive working postures.

⁷ This is commonly referred to as Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS) or Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI).

The *National Standard for Manual Handling [NOHSC:1001 (1990)]* and the *National Code of Practice for Manual Handling [NOHSC:2005 (1990)]*⁸ outline a number of risk factors which increase the likely development of a musculoskeletal injury. These include:

- **working posture and position** (eg. sitting at a workstation with the neck tilted backwards to view the computer monitor, or adopting an awkward posture when filling the photocopier with paper)
- **repetition** (eg. keyboard data entry performed each time a phone call is answered) **and duration** (the length of time a worker is exposed to a risk factor, such as repetitive movement or awkward and/or static posture)
- **workplace and workstation layout** (includes all the components of the workplace workplace – such as, equipment, materials and work surfaces – used for a work task)
- **work organisation** (the way work is organised in relation to staffing levels, pace of work and rest breaks).

The *National Code of Practice for the Prevention of Occupational Overuse Syndrome [NOHSC:2013 (1994)]*⁹ provides practical guidance in meeting the requirements of the *National Standard for Manual Handling [NOHSC:1001 (1990)]* with respect to the prevention of risks, and the identification, assessment and control of risks.

WorkCover's publication *Health and Safety in the Office* also provides information that may be useful to call centres on common hazards in the physical environment.

Psychological Environment

Good human resource practices and people management can promote a positive working environment, which in turn increases staff morale and productivity.

To achieve this, consider the psychological environment in which your employees work to identify any risks to their psychological health.

Techniques to improve the psychological working environment may include:

- consulting with employees about aspects of their work that may affect their psychological health (eg. conduct of performance monitoring, shiftwork)
- providing a secluded room or area where employees can discuss with their supervisor after difficult calls, or provision of professional counselling if required
- providing sufficient information, instruction, training, and supervision for employees to do their job
- giving employees the opportunity to participate fully in setting achievable performance targets and the method of conducting performance monitoring
- providing opportunities for employees to discuss work tasks, performance and feedback issues with their supervisors
- adequate and regular breaks from calls.

By using the risk management approach outlined earlier and, in more detail, in Appendix 2, you are likely to be able to identify and address a range of additional physical or psychological factors that should be addressed to ensure your workplace is safe.

⁸ These two documents are available through the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC) at www.nohsc.gov.au. NOHSC is a tripartite body established by the Commonwealth Government to develop, facilitate and implement a national occupational health and safety strategy.

⁹ Available through NOHSC at www.nohsc.gov.au

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

NSW Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000

NSW Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001

NSW Workers Compensation Act 1987

NSW Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998

Workplace Amenities Code of Practice 2001, WorkCover NSW

First Aid in the Workplace Guide 2001, WorkCover NSW

OHS Consultation Code of Practice 2001, WorkCover NSW

Risk Management at Work Guide 2001, WorkCover NSW

Risk Assessment Code of Practice 2001, WorkCover NSW

Armed Hold-ups and Cash Handling, WorkCover NSW

Violence in the Workplace Guide 2002, WorkCover NSW

Managing Workplace Violence in the Finance Sector, WorkCover NSW and Business Services IRG

Smoke-free Environment Act 2000

Passive Smoking-Policy and Control 2000, WorkCover NSW

Workplace Safety Kit Guide 2001, WorkCover NSW

Small Business Safety Starter Kit Guide 2001, WorkCover NSW

USEFUL CONTACTS

WorkCover Assistance Service www.workcover.nsw.gov.au	13 10 50
WorkCover Publications Hotline	1300 799 003
For the nearest WorkCover NSW office	13 10 50
Australian Services Union www.asuclerical-nsw.asn.au	(02) 9265 8211
Australian Teleservices Association www.ata.asn.au	(02) 9906 6163
CEPU Communications Division NSW Telecommunications and Services Branch www.ceputelserv.asn.au	(02) 9281 2811
Employers First www.employersfirst.org.au	(02) 9264 2000
Finance Sector Union www.fsunion.org.au	(02) 9273 8222
Labour Council of NSW www.labour.net.au	(02) 9264 1691
Standards Australia	1300 654 646

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Employer Safety Checklist for Call Centres

Appendix 2. OHS Risk Management Process

Appendix 3. Risk Management Form

Appendix 4. Guide to Developing an OHS policy

Appendix 5. Safe Work Procedures

Appendix 6. Purchasing Procedures

Appendix 1

EMPLOYER SAFETY CHECKLIST FOR CALL CENTRES

This checklist is based on the potential hazards identified in these Guidelines. It is not a comprehensive list of all hazards within call centres. You must apply the OHS risk management process (Appendix 2) for all foreseeable hazards that have been identified whether or not they have been outlined in this checklist.

<i>If a box is not ticked, something should be done about that issue</i>	Tick if YES
Training	
Have employees been educated/trained to recognise poor ergonomic risk factors (i.e. awkward postures, repetitive and sustained movements, and forces) associated with Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have employees been trained in the correct adjustment of workstation furniture to enable them to achieve neutral postures (as shown in Diagram 1)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chairs	
Is the seat height adjustable for the range of users within the workforce?	<input type="checkbox"/>
From a seated position, can the height of the chair be easily adjusted?	<input type="checkbox"/>
From a seated position, can the backrest be easily adjusted for height and angle?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the seat pan width and depth adequate and comfortable when sitting?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do employees' elbows avoid hitting the backrest and armrest (if provided) when performing their job?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can the computer screen be adjusted for height and viewing distance from the seated position?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Desks	
Is the desk height adjustable between 580mm & 730mm?	<input type="checkbox"/>
If 'no', is there a height adjustable chair and footrest available to achieve neutral postures (as shown in Diagram 1)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the desk depth sufficient for the computer screen, keyboard, and document holder?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the desk wide enough for the task?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the top surface non-reflective?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there adequate leg space under the desk?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other equipment	
If necessary, do employees have the choice of using footrests to achieve correct lower limb postures?	<input type="checkbox"/>
If necessary, do employees have the choice of using document holders?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone headset use	
Is the background noise level low enough that operators do not have to turn up the volume of their headsets?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the operators' headsets free from sudden bursts of loud noise, such as line interference?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are operators provided with individual headsets?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a system of maintaining and exchanging faulty headsets?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the headsets cleaned on a regular basis, and cleaned prior to issuing to another operator to avoid the spread of infections?	<input type="checkbox"/>

General	
Are there clear procedures for employees to report defective equipment?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is defective equipment promptly fixed or replaced?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are employees allowed sufficient time to make correct adjustments to their desks and chairs before they start work?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working space	
Is there adequate space (eg. for equipment/furniture used at workstations) for employees to work safely?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are employees able to move unhindered and safely around the workplace?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the floors and surfaces constructed and maintained to minimise the risk of slips, trips and falls?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manual handling tasks and keyboard work¹⁰	
Are the job tasks free from:	
Awkward postures (static, non-neutral angles of body joints)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Repetitive movements (more than twice a minute)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Repetitive or sustained force (for more than 30 seconds at a time)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Long durations (more than 2 hours over a whole shift or continuously for more than 30 minutes)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Large force (eg. lifting loads in excess of 4.5kg whilst seated)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lighting	
Is the lighting level at the workstation adequate for the task?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the workplace free of excessive glare or reflection?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is adequate lighting provided to allow employees to work safely in the workplace?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ventilation	
Does the ventilation and air movement in the work environment provide adequate thermal comfort throughout the year for the majority of employees?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Psychological environment	
Are employees provided with sufficient information, instruction, training, and supervision to allow them to do their job?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does regular consultation occur with employees about aspects of their work (eg. conduct of performance monitoring, shiftwork, etc) that may affect their psychological health?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are operators provided with adequate and regular breaks from calls?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there systems in place for operators to deal with angry, dissatisfied clients?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the operators trained in the above system to deal with these clients?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are employees provided with opportunities to discuss work tasks, performance and feedback issues with their supervisors?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are employees given the opportunity to participate fully in setting achievable performance targets and the method of conducting performance monitoring?	<input type="checkbox"/>

¹⁰ Refer to the following reference material for further information:

- Manual Tasks Advisory Standard 2000 - *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* [Qld]
<http://www.whs.qld.gov.au/advisory/adv028.pdf>

- Code of Practice for Manual Handling 2000 - *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985* [Vic]
[http://www.workcover.vic.gov.au/vwa/vwacop.nsf/COP/A3259AFB7531D4A14A256873000078EB/\\$File/COP25.PDF](http://www.workcover.vic.gov.au/vwa/vwacop.nsf/COP/A3259AFB7531D4A14A256873000078EB/$File/COP25.PDF)

- National Code of Practice for Manual Handling [NOHSC:2005 (1990)].

Appendix 2

OHS RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS

The OHS risk management process provides employers with the information they need to make decisions about how best to avoid or control the impact of workplace hazards. The process is comprised of a four-step cycle:

STEP 1 IDENTIFY HAZARDS in the workplace. You can do this by:

- reviewing past injury/illness and accident investigation records
- talking to employees
- doing a walk round inspection of the workplace
- analysing the way work tasks are performed.

Hazards associated with call centres can arise in many broad contexts. Some of these are:

- manual tasks (eg. working postures, repetition and duration)
- work environment (eg. workstation, psychological factors, lighting)
- noise (eg. background noise, headset use)
- plant (eg. equipment, machinery, appliances)
- substances (eg. chemicals)
- energy (eg. electricity)

The list above may be used as a guide to assist in identifying hazards in your workplace.

The *Employer Safety Checklist for Call Centres* (Appendix 1) provides a useful mechanism for identifying hazards.

Other ways include:

- reviewing current systems and work procedures
- regularly consulting with employees to see if they have identified hazards
- acting on OHS complaints.

When looking for hazards employers should consider:

- the suitability of workers' equipment and their work location
- how people use equipment and materials
- how people might be affected by noise, fumes, lighting, and other environmental factors
- the potential for people to be hurt by equipment, machinery or tools
- the potential for people to be affected by chemicals and other substances used in the workplace.

The Risk Management Form (Appendix 3) can be used as a tool to record the results of the OHS risk management process and keep track of decisions about who will be responsible for eliminating or controlling each risk.

In the example below, a call centre has identified 'prolonged static working postures' as a hazard in the workplace.

Hazard	Risk priority			Controls	Person responsible for action and by when	Date completed
	Severity	Likelihood	Priority			
Prolonged static working postures						

Once all the hazards have been identified, employers need to find out whether there is any guidance material, minimum standards or legislation governing the particular hazard. This can be done by contacting any of the organisations listed in the 'Contacts' section of these Guidelines. Where such information exists, it should be followed and/or implemented immediately. If no information is found, then employers need to proceed to the next stage to find out how to 'assess' the risks that each hazard may create.

STEP 2 ASSESS RISKS to determine the likelihood of an incident arising from the identified hazard, and the severity (ie. seriousness) of the outcome if an incident did occur.

In assessing the risk, you should:

- review the available health and safety information relevant to the hazard
- identify the factors contributing to its risk, including:
 - the work environment
 - the capability, skill, experience and age of the people ordinarily doing the work
 - the system of work being used
 - any reasonably foreseeable abnormal conditions
- identify what records are necessary.

Once you have done this, you should prioritise the risks to determine which ones you should address first.

- a) First, determine how severely someone could be hurt by selecting one of the following consequences for each hazard identified and recording the relevant symbol under '**severity**' on the Risk Management Form (Appendix 3):

X	could kill or cause permanent disability or ill health
!!!	long-term illness or serious injury
!!	medical attention and several days off work
!	first aid treatment needed and no time off work.

Consider:

- the potential for the hazard to become more serious, and
- individual differences between employees, including physical and psychological health.

- b) Second, determine how likely it is that an incident will occur in relation to the hazard identified and record the relevant symbol under '**likelihood**' on the Risk Management Form (Appendix 3):

VL	Very likely could happen anytime
L	Likely could happen occasionally
UL	Unlikely could happen, but only rarely
VUL	Very unlikely could happen, but probably never will

Consider:

- the number of times a situation arises
- the number of people potentially exposed, the duration of their exposure, and their skills/experience
- the location of the hazard relative to people
- the quantities of materials or possible points of exposure
- environmental conditions
- the condition of equipment
- the effectiveness of existing control measures
- any special factors that might affect the likelihood of an occurrence.

c) Now match the severity and likelihood of exposure on the Risk Priority Chart below to rank risks in terms of their priority, and record the number under '**priority**' on the Risk Management Form (Appendix 3):

RISK PRIORITY CHART

Severity	Likelihood			
	Very Likely could happen anytime	Likely could happen occasionally	Unlikely could happen, but only rarely	Very Unlikely could happen, but probably never will
X kill or cause permanent disability or ill health	1	1	2	3
!!! long-term illness or serious injury	1	2	3	4
!! medical attention and several days off work	2	3	4	5
! first aid treatment needed and no time off work	3	4	5	5

The numbers (1-6) in the Risk Priority Chart indicate how important it is to do something about each risk.

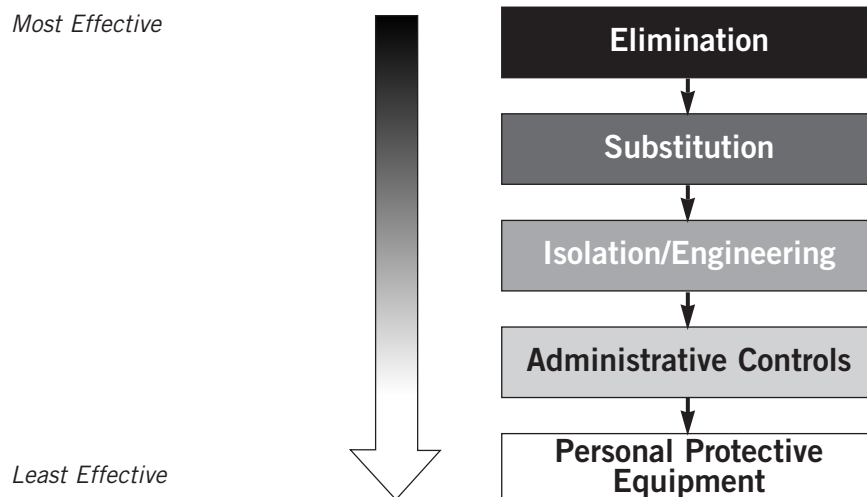
- 1-2 = Do something about these risks immediately**
- 3-4 = Do something about these risks as soon as possible**
- 5-6 = These risks may not need your immediate attention.**

In the example below, where the identified hazard is 'prolonged static working postures', the risk associated with this hazard has been assessed by recording the 'severity' as having the potential to cause 'serious injury', represented by this symbol '!!!'; and the 'likelihood' being 'very likely' to occur, represented by this symbol 'VL'. Given the high likelihood and severity the risk is ranked as a Priority '1', which means that this risk should be addressed immediately, as a top priority.

Hazard	Risk priority			Controls	Person responsible for action and by when	Date completed
	Severity	Likelihood	Priority			
Prolonged static working postures	!!!	VL	1			

Remember: you may decide that the same hazard could lead to several different possible outcomes. So for each hazard judge how likely each possible outcome is and record the highest priority.

STEP 3 CONTROL RISKS by deciding and applying what needs to be done to remove or control the risks to health and safety. The following diagram outlines the most effective methods of controlling risks in order of effectiveness:



a) Elimination: This is the most effective approach, and OHS legislation requires employers to try to remove the hazard completely before trying the other means of controlling risks identified below. Examples of eliminating a hazard would be, discontinuing dangerous work practices or removing hazardous substances or equipment from the workplace. In a call centre, excessive keying to record large amounts of data may give rise to the risk of musculoskeletal injury as a result of overuse of soft tissue in the neck, shoulders, back, hands and/or wrists. Employers may decide that this information can be entered in other ways that requires less keying, for example by using improved software design.

If this is not possible, then they must prevent or reduce exposure to the risk to the lowest possible level by trying to apply methods (b) and then (c), in order of priority:

b) Substitution: Replace the hazard with a less hazardous option. For example, replace a work process, material or equipment. In a call centre, the chemical currently used to clean/disinfect headsets might be replaced with another cleaning fluid that gives rise to less risk than the current chemical being used.

c) Isolation/Engineering: Isolate the hazard from people by making changes to the work environment or practices so that exposure is minimised, or redesign equipment or work practices so that work can be done differently. For example, office resources such as photocopiers, printers and faxes may be creating excessive background noise affecting employees.

The employer should relocate such office equipment to a separate area away from employees.

If none of the options above are possible, as a last resort, use options (d) or (e) as temporary measures, to reduce the likelihood of risk while a more permanent solution is found, and/or to supplement other controls:

d) Administrative Controls: Reduce the risk by improved supervision, instruction, training, job rotation or adjusting rosters, etc. For example, employers should introduce regular breaks away from calls into call centre rosters to reduce the exposure of employees to risks of physical and psychological injury.

e) Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Only use PPE when you can't reduce the likelihood of risk in any other way. For example, the use of a wrist support might reduce the risk of repetitive strain injury.

In practice, several control options are often used in combination to reduce the risk of injury or illness. Measures, such as administrative controls and PPE, are often used as interim solutions while permanent solutions are implemented.

In a call centre, for example, you can apply 'substitution' to control 'prolonged static working postures' by redesigning the job and furniture or equipment to encourage changes in posture. This control measure should be supplemented by training (ie. administrative control) to ensure employees have a good understanding of the risks associated with the identified hazard and how job redesign can control exposure to the risk. This is recorded on the Risk Management Form (Appendix 3), as shown below:

Hazard	Risk priority			Controls	Person responsible for action and by when	Date completed
	Severity	Likelihood	Priority			
Prolonged static working postures	!!!	VL	1	1. Job/ equipment redesign to permit postural changes. 2. Training in the above.		

Now you need to decide who will be responsible for implementing the controls and then ensuring that they have been completed.

Hazard	Risk priority			Controls	Person responsible for action and by when	Date completed
	Severity	Likelihood	Priority			
Prolonged static working postures	!!!	VL	1	1. Job/ equipment redesign to permit postural changes. 2. Training in the above.	Team Manager/ Supervisor 28.06.02 Supervisor 10.07.02	24.06.2002 10.07.2002

To ensure that control measures operate effectively, you should consider the following:

- **Develop safe work procedures**¹¹ to ensure employees know how to do the job properly and safely
- **Communicate and consult** with employees and others about the control measures and the reasons for their implementation
- **Provide training** for employees, particularly where changes in work procedures occur as a result of the implementation of the control measures
- **Supervise employees** to verify that the control measures are effective and that they are following procedures
- **Maintain the control measures** to ensure their ongoing effectiveness. Also, specify review and maintenance procedures for the new control measures as part of routine work practices.

STEP 4 MONITOR AND REVIEW – once the controls have been implemented, employers should monitor and review the measures that were applied by consulting with employees to ensure they are working, and identify safer ways of doing things.

Here are some things employers need to consider when monitoring and reviewing control measures:

- are they in place?
- are they being used?
- are they being used correctly?
- are they working?

Hazards may change from time to time as the workplace and procedures change. Employers should set up a routine of periodic hazard checks (eg. performing regular inspections and safety audits) and establish a date to review the entire risk management process.

¹¹ See Page 16, and Appendix 5 and 6 of these Guidelines for more information on developing procedures.

GUIDE TO DEVELOPING AN OHS POLICY

1. **Determine OHS responsibilities** to clearly outline what the organisation expects of everyone in ensuring a safe and healthy workplace. This should reflect the responsibilities of all levels of the organisation.
2. **Develop a rough draft of the policy** using the sample OHS policy, on the next page, as a guide. Discuss this with senior management and reach agreement on the draft.
3. **Discuss the draft with the consultative committee** (the OHS Committee¹² or the committee that may have been set up to develop the OHS systems).
4. **Put the draft out for comment by employees** and review if necessary.
5. **Have senior management endorse the policy.**
6. **Publicise and promote the policy.** This can be done by:
 - placing copies of the policy in prominent positions in the organisation (noticeboards, foyer etc.)
 - using the policy to drive the OHS program¹³.
 - incorporating the policy in OHS training for employees.

A form for developing an OHS policy is provided on the next page. This can be completed once employers have identified who has particular health and safety responsibilities in the workplace.

¹² For further information refer to WorkCover's *OHS Consultation Code of Practice 2001*.

¹³ In order to implement the general provisions of an OHS policy, employers should set up a program of activities and procedures that are continually updated and effectively implement. These activities and procedures are outlined on the next page and can be included in an OHS policy.

OHS POLICY

The occupational health, safety and welfare of all persons employed within [enter organisation name] and those visiting [enter organisation name] are considered to be of the utmost importance. Resources in line with the importance attached to occupational health and safety will be made available to comply with all relevant Acts and Regulations and to ensure that the workplace is safe and without risk to health.

The employer (Management) is responsible for:

Supervisors (Team Leaders) and managers are responsible for:

Employees are responsible for:

We expect contractors and visitors to:

Occupational Health and Safety Program

In order to implement the general provisions of this policy, a program of activities and procedures will be set up, continually updated and effectively carried out. The program will relate to all aspects of occupational health and safety including:

- OHS training and education,
- work design, workplace design and standard work methods,
- changes to work methods and practice; including those associated with technological change,
- emergency procedures and drills,
- provision of OHS equipment, services and facilities,
- workplace inspections and evaluations,
- reporting and recording of incidents, accidents, injuries and illnesses, and
- provision of information to employees, contractors and visitors.

Signed (Responsible Officer): _____

Date: _____

Name: _____

Signed (Staff Representative): _____

Date: _____

Name: _____

Policy Review Date: _____

SAFE WORK PROCEDURES

The tasks and jobs people perform can expose them to hazards associated with the equipment and chemicals they use, the work environment, and the physical nature of the tasks themselves. Therefore, safe work procedures should be developed for those tasks that are likely to put the health and safety of employees at risk.

These procedures should be developed or reviewed when:

- a new job or task will be introduced
- changes are planned to a job or task
- new equipment or chemicals to the workplace will be introduced
- there is a problem (after an accident or incident that suggests the procedures are inadequate)
- a health and safety issue is identified.

Employers should analyse work procedures in the context of the approach to OHS risk management described earlier. The procedure should note and assess the potential OHS problems and identify the measures that are to be taken to eliminate or reduce the risks for the particular task. Once the procedures are developed, employers must ensure that employees receive adequate information, instruction, training and supervision in the procedures.

This is an example of a very basic safe work procedure that may be used in a call centre operation for the task 'attending to inbound/outbound calls':

TASK	SAFE WORK PROCEDURE
Attending to inbound/outbound calls	Avoid prolonged static working postures Incorporate regular changes to posture Ensure training in correct working posture has been completed.

Remember, employers should ensure that employees receive adequate information, instruction, training and supervision in all procedures.

WorkCover's guides, *Workplace Safety Kit Guide 2001* and *Small Business Safety Starter Kit Guide 2001*, provide good information on how to write effective safe work procedures.

Appendix 6

PURCHASING PROCEDURES

To introduce risk management into a purchasing procedure, employers need to consider:

- what hazards are associated with the purchase?
- what risks will the purchase introduce? and
- what strategies need to be implemented to control risks?

Employers can do this using the checklist below whenever a purchasing decision is considered.

ISSUES	RESPONSE/COMMENT
1. What is the proposed purchase item?	
2. What safety information has been obtained regarding the item?	<input type="checkbox"/> Equipment manual <input type="checkbox"/> MSDS ¹⁴ (for chemical purchases) <input type="checkbox"/> Australian Standards <input type="checkbox"/> Other safety information
3. Which employees and work processes are affected by the purchase?	
4. Have the affected employees been consulted when?	
5. What are the health and safety risks relevant to the purchase?	
6. How will the purchase help manage the risks?	
7. What has to be done to ensure the use, storage and transport of the purchase is safe?	
8. What change will need to be made to Safe Work Procedures?	
9. What training will be required before the use of the purchase?	

Remember, employers must ensure that employees receive adequate information, instruction, training and supervision in all procedures.

WorkCover's Guides, *Workplace Safety Kit Guide 2001* and *Small Business Safety Starter Kit Guide 2001*, provide good information on how to write effective purchasing procedures.

¹⁴ Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) is obtained/must be supplied from the supplier of a chemical substance. MSDS's detail the health and safety risks posed by the substance, how to handle and store the chemical safely, and what exposure controls should be used such as ventilation and appropriate personal protective equipment.

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