

Insight aims to provide useful information, links and tips in the areas of Risk Management, Occupational Health and Safety, Business Continuity Management, and other areas relating to management systems and corporate governance.

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Mental Health, Bullying & Harassment

With National Mental Health Week starting in less than 10 days ([9-15 October 2016](#)), it is timely to consider the responsibilities of employers in managing the WHS risks to their workers that can occur in the area of mental health, over and above physical health.

As discussed in [Insight issue 63](#), mental health is an increasingly recognised WHS risk, however many employers still find it challenging to realise that they are also responsible for their workers' *mental* health and safety.

Factors impacting on mental health that arise from a particular worker's personal circumstances may be very difficult to even identify, let alone provide assistance with, although there are strategies and processes that can be effective (refer [Insight issue 63](#)).

However, a more obvious source of psychosocial risks in the workplace, that is well within the purview of employers and supervisors to take responsibility for, is bullying and/or harassment.



Bullying or harassment is a distressingly common experience for workers in organisations of all types. Safe Work Australia's recently revised [Guide for Preventing and Responding to Workplace Bullying](#) lists the likely impacts of bullying in the workplace:

- On the individual:
 - distress, anxiety, panic attacks or sleep disturbance
 - physical illness, for example muscular tension, headaches, fatigue and digestive problems
 - loss of self-esteem and self-confidence
 - feelings of isolation



- deteriorating relationships with colleagues, family and friends
- negative impact on work performance, concentration and decision making ability
- depression
- thoughts of suicide
- On the organisation:
 - high staff turnover and associated recruitment and training costs
 - low morale and motivation
 - increased absenteeism
 - lost productivity
 - disruption to work when investigations are undertaken into complaints
 - costs associated with counselling, mediation and support
 - costly workers' compensation claims or legal action
 - damage to the reputation of the business

Harassment is fundamentally similar to bullying but involves an element of discrimination (based on gender, race, ethnic background, colour, religion or belief, sexual orientation or disability), and has a similar range of impacts as bullying.

A range of strategies for the prevention of bullying (or harassment) are also outlined in the Safe Work Australia Guide, ranging from management commitment to set the standard for workplace behaviour, providing training and information, designing safe systems of work and implementing reporting and response procedures.

In the context of slowly-increasing gender equality in Australian workplaces, where women are becoming steadily more likely to occupy positions of authority over their male colleagues, [recent research](#) suggests that gender-based harassment can have an underlying

societal element that requires even more careful consideration of prevention and management strategies.

The study (conducted in the public sector, but suggested by the author to be as or more likely to apply to private sector workplaces) found that sexual harassment was used by men against women in positions of authority, as a means to penalise them for perceived gender nonconformity.

Such a finding increases the importance of developing appropriate organisational policies and training that reflect the full range of harassment experiences, including procedures to allow women to report harassment while protecting their authority.

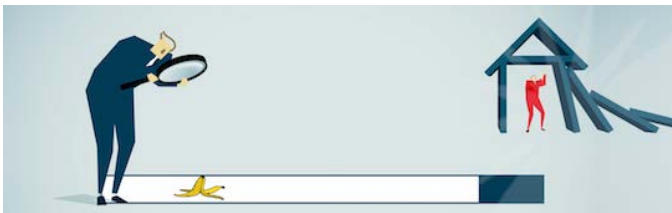
Please [contact QRMC](#) for more information.

Beyond the Hazard Hunt: Are we missing the big picture?

Safety observations and interactions provide an ideal opportunity to have Managers out in the field observing and interacting with their workforce. This achieves a number of positive by-products from visible leadership through to addressing the due diligence requirements.

However, one of the unintended outcomes of this can be that Management personnel may become too focused on achieving the prescribed KPI of the safety observation, and fail to recognize the bigger risk exposures.





We don't have to look very far back to see examples of where this hyper-focus on 'hazard hunting' has resulted in poor safety management outcomes. The 2014 Official investigation into the Deepwater Horizon Incident found that the *"organizational culture focused more on personal safety and behavioural observations than on major accident prevention"*. The BP executives were on the platform undertaking observations just hours before the beginnings of the incident that resulted in the death of 11 workers, the injury of 17 more, and the worst environmental disaster in the United States, releasing about 4.9 million barrels of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

WHS as a discipline has matured over the last 3 decades such that it has become everyone's responsibility to consider the safety implications of their daily work. However, the accountability still sits with Management, so it certainly makes more sense that they look at the big-ticket risk exposures and leave some of the lower-hanging hazard hunt inspections to Supervisors, Team Leaders, HSR and workers. Given the array of business and operational risks that must be managed, a proportion of Management 'safety observation' time could be profitably redirected to ensuring that the critical control measures for higher-consequence, less-likely risks are effective.

To shift focus, the safety observation checklist should be replaced with a copy of the workplace Risk Register as a means of prompting the review of controls that are in

place to prevent or mitigate the impacts of these often overlooked higher-consequence, lower-likelihood risks. This more balanced approach to the safety observations adds to the layers of assurance, provides greater operational benefit, and a more comprehensive view of proceedings for due diligence requirements.

QRMC can assist with Risk Reviews and also with tailoring KPIs to maximize the output potential.

Please [contact QRMC](#) for more information.

Choosing PPE

PPE, or Personal Protective Equipment, is a very broad term that can include anything from a sun hat to a full-face respirator. The term describes anything is anything used or worn by a worker to minimise risk to their health or safety.

Appropriate PPE is sometimes the only way to control the risk to health and safety of a worker, and it is therefore critical that organisations supply, and ensure the use of, appropriate PPE. But how to be sure what's appropriate?

In a highly regulated country like Australia, most key items of PPE related to maintaining safety in the workplace are covered by an Australian Standard. Providing the required PPE is certified under the relevant Standard, the employer should be able to have confidence that it will perform as expected to protect the worker. Unfortunately, there are products on the market that claim to meet the requirements of Australian Standards when in actual fact they don't, which is the first among a range of pitfalls that can diminish the efficacy of PPE.

There is, however, a basic checklist that employers and/or their procurement personnel can use to help ensure that their expenditure on PPE actually buys a piece of equipment that will provide the expected level of worker protection.

1. Inform yourself as to which Australian Standard applies to the equipment concerned, and check that the Standard number and certification marks are present on the item.
2. Check that whatever the PPE is specifically designed for is identified on its labelling.
3. If the item comes in more than one size, ensure the PPE is the correct size(s) for the intended user(s). Consider professional fitting assistance if there is sizing complexity.
4. Check that the specific end-use of the PPE is included in its functional description (e.g. confirm a respirator is suitable for use with the class of chemical being used in the workplace).
5. Don't buy second-hand PPE, as it can be impossible to tell whether the equipment has been maintained in a fit-for-purpose standard or damaged.

Also, once an item is purchased:

1. Ensure that processes are implemented to check and maintain the equipment. This might include anything from a regular observation to check for deterioration or cracks, to a regular third-party inspection, depending on the equipment concerned.
2. Replace the PPE as often as required to maintain its safe performance, depending on the conditions in which it is used.
3. Keep a good record of PPE issued in order to both ensure all workers have the protection they need, and to facilitate an appropriate replacement schedule.

Please [contact QRMC](#) for more information.



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