

Occupational Health and Safety in Defence – 2007



Good occupational health and safety (OHS) practice is essential to Defence. It goes beyond simply complying with government and legal regulations surrounding health and safety. It represents a commitment that is shared by Defence Senior Leaders who are directing OHS performance to better protect our most important capability, our people.

Defence OHS has been highlighted this year through a variety of events supported by the Occupational Health, Safety and Compensation (OHSC) Branch, within the Personnel Executive. The Branch has coordinated and participated in a number of events and programs to promote Defence OHS and encourage personnel to focus on workplace health and safety issues.

Safe Work Australia Week

On behalf of Defence, the OHSC Branch worked with the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC) to promote Safe Work Australia Week (21-27 October 2007.)

To coincide with the week Defence launched its new OHS Strategy 2007-2012 that sets the priority for OHS activity. The strategy was launched on 26 October by Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, Head Personnel Executive, Major General Mick Slater, Director General Occupational Health, Safety and Compensation, Mr Mal Pearce and attended by Secretary of Defence, Nick Warner and the Chief Executive Officer of COMCARE, Mr Martin Dolan.

This national week was developed to raise awareness on workplace safety issues across Australia, encouraging employers and employees at all levels to focus on improving safety within their workplace.

Defence personnel were encouraged to conduct activities to promote OHS awareness and involve their colleagues.

Nearly 100 activities were registered for the week. Around 1,300 Defence personnel participated in a variety of events, including lunchtime walks, OHS

awareness presentations and office safety audits.

A list of the Defence activities held during Safe Work Australia Week can be found at <http://ohsc.defence.gov.au/SafeWorkAustraliaWeek/>

2007 SRCC Safety Awards

The Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (SRCC) Safety Awards are designed to recognise agencies and individuals that achieve excellence in OHS, rehabilitation and return to work practices.

The winners and commendations from the 2007 Defence Safety Awards were automatic entries in the SRCC Safety Awards.

This year's SRCC Safety Awards attracted 43 entries across five categories with four entries from Defence selected as finalists.

Winners were announced at the SRCC Awards Ceremony dinner, held at Parliament House on 24 October, with two Defence entrants winning their category.

Category Three: Best Solution to an Identified Workplace Health and Safety Issue

- Marine Boarding Party Ladder – Royal Australian Navy (Winner)
- Sheet Metal Handling Trolley – Defence Science and Technology Organisation Edinburgh (Finalist)

Category Four: Best Individual Contribution to Health and Safety

- Inorganic Lead Awareness Package – Captain Sharryn Batt, Army (Winner)

Category Five: Best Rehabilitation and Return to Work Award

- Civilian Absence Management in Defence – Defence Support Group (Finalist)

Further information is available at

Intranet <http://ohsc.defence.gov.au/DefenceOHS Awards/>

Internet <http://www.defence.gov.au/dpe/ohsc/programs/safetyAwards/>

Defence Highway Rest Stop Program 2007/2008

Acknowledging that fatigue management is an important factor in road safety, Defence has in place the Defence Highway Rest Stop Program. This annual program provides overnight transit accommodation at various Defence bases. Operating since 1999, the program was introduced to support Defence people and their families travelling off-duty over the Christmas and New Year period.

With many Defence personnel using this time off to visit family and friends, the Christmas holiday period is commonly viewed as a time of heightened danger on our roads with increases in traffic, travel times and distance.

A number of Defence bases participate in the program by offering a variety of accommodation facilities, ranging from single to family size rooms across Australia. To meet the Defence base access requirements and accommodation needs, bookings must be made in advance. Full details of the Highway Rest Stop Program may be obtained from the websites listed below. Intranet: <http://ohsc.defence.gov.au/Programs/RoadSafety/> or Internet: <http://www.defence.gov.au/dpe/ohsc/programs/roadsafety/>

Occupational Health and Safety – Launch of OHS Strategy

On 26 October 2007, as part of 'Safe Work Australia Week', the Chief of the Defence Force and the Secretary launched the Defence Occupational Health and Safety Strategy 2007-12 at Defence's new Brindabella Park offices at Canberra Airport.

The OHS Strategy sets out the broad direction in which Defence will manage OHS into the future. It defines where Defence wants to be in five years' time – effectively, a program for continuous improvement.

The OHS Strategy's duration is five years so as to make it consistent with the National OHS Strategy articulated by the Australian Safety and Compensation Council.

The new OHS Strategy will be implemented through a detailed implementation plan formulated by the Occupational Health, Safety and Compensation Branch (OHSC) within the Personnel Executive in concert with the Services and Groups. Implementation will be monitored by the Defence Occupational Health and Safety Committee.

The new OHS Strategy is fundamental to the OHSC's role as the entity responsible for the management of OHS at the corporate level.

DEFENCE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Foundation Objectives

1. Further develop and implement the elements of the Defence-wide OHS Management System.
2. Develop and implement a Defence OHS Management Information System to improve the quality of OHS information available to decision makers at all levels.

Operational Objectives

3. Reduce the frequency and severity of risks to people's health and safety.
4. Improve prevention of occupational injury, illness and disease.
5. Reduce the impact of occupational injury, illness and disease.

Enabling Objectives

6. Train, support and motivate personnel to identify and manage hazards effectively.
7. Improve and embed a systematic capability to identify, eliminate or manage hazards in the design and planning stages of Defence's activities.
8. Enable Defence personnel to manage the OHS performance of third parties, consistent with Defence policies and practices.

Central to improving our OHS performance is having effective systems in place (as it is for any business activity). Accordingly, the first objective of the new OHS Strategy is to establish a corporate or enterprise based OHS Management System.

This will provide for the integration and coordination of individual Service and Group safety management systems so as to improve the overall effectiveness of managing OHS risks throughout Defence.

This is necessary because the Services and Defence Groups do not exist in isolation from each other. There are a multitude of examples where OHS issues cross over Service and Group boundaries. For example, the services delivered by the Defence Support Group and the Defence Materiel Organisation.

There are also numerous examples of collocation – where the work practices of those who are collocated invariably impinge upon each other – even if their business activities are not directly related. Finally, and most importantly, there is the joint operational environment.

It must be acknowledged that comprehensive, detailed and well documented safety management systems will not necessarily solve all our problems. They are not infallible. Safety cannot be assured by simply introducing a safety management system.

There is no shortage of investigations into accidents that reveal that the organisation involved had a sound safety management system, but it was not followed because it was not easily understood, people were unaware of it or they simply chose to ignore it. The system existed in theory but not in practice.

It is not enough to develop systems – we need to establish a culture in which our people understand and appreciate the importance of safety management systems. A good safety culture – which goes beyond mere compliance and which promotes a genuine awareness of risk – provides a way to overcome the inevitable limitations of safety systems.

The second Foundation Objective of the OHS Strategy deals with management information. One of the key ways of improving our safety outcomes is to improve substantially the flow of information across Defence.

This includes information from those actually doing the work, which tells leaders and managers what is going wrong – including the latent conditions that may give rise to an accident – as well as information from leaders and managers. The latter should make it clear to those doing the work what safety standards and practices are expected of them.

Improving the flow of OHS management information has three major elements. First, we need to improve the quality of the information we receive about accidents and incidents – much of which comes from the Defence-wide form AC563. Audits, investigations and inspections, as well as Boards of Inquiry, also provide important information, as can periodic surveys of our people. It is not sufficient to have established reporting arrangements; we need to create a culture where all OHS incidents and accidents are reported as a 'matter of fact'.

Second, we need to improve the capability to disseminate the information to the users quickly and in a form they can easily understand. Here, we are reliant on the available technology.

Third, we need to interrogate and analyse the information effectively so that we can understand what is happening across the entire Defence Organisation quickly, so that we have the capability to predict events (and take any necessary corrective action). Timely and accurate information also allows us to compare ourselves with other organisations and industries and to set targets.

In striving to reduce the incidence of work related injuries and illnesses in Defence over the next five years, we need to go well beyond complying with legislative compliance. We need to substantially improve our safety culture.

This will require Defence leaders, managers and personnel at all levels to be aware of their OHS responsibilities, and to be accountable for the OHS outcomes within their respective areas of responsibility. In doing so, safety needs to be given an overriding priority. We need to focus on safety so it can genuinely be said that Defence has developed a culture of safety.