

Five safety processes that prevent injuries - and scrutiny

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Employers must have five processes in place to avoid regulatory scrutiny and action around the risk of psychological injuries, a safety inspector has warned.

They must avoid the common practice of automatically treating workers' complaints as vexatious, WorkSafe WA senior scientific officer Kath Jones told the Australian and New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine's Annual Scientific Meeting in Western Australia yesterday.

This is part two of *OHS Alert's* coverage of Jones' seminar on preventing psychological injuries.

Part one outlined her call for employers to proactively address organisational stressors, which, when combined, increase the risk of stress injuries in workers exponentially (see related article).

In this article, Jones examines the bare-minimum safety systems that employers need to avoid being issued a mental-stress-related notice from a workplace safety regulator. She says that:

- Set behaviour standards** are vital, but employers should avoid overarching codes of conduct that don't translate across localised workplaces within the organisation.

Employers need to be very clear about what types of behaviours are okay and what aren't, ensure disciplinary measures are consistently enforced, and apply the standards from the top down so that leaders are accountable for more than just enforcement.
- Good work design** sounds basic, but is "often done poorly". Employers need to provide workers with the proper information and training to perform their jobs, and periodically review their workloads because they fluctuate over time, Jones says.
- Respectful working relationships** are facilitated by building leadership skills in managers, communicating with staff and being clear and obvious about performance management processes and workloads.

Employers need to ensure that management proactively facilitates working relationships and teamwork, and doesn't ignore complaints of conflict from workers until they spiral out of control.
- Effective reporting, response and grievance procedures** ensure workers feel safe and comfortable raising issues regardless of the degree of seriousness. Many workplaces automatically assume workers' complaints are made vexatiously, and employers need to ensure managers adhere to grievance procedures, and that those procedures are periodically reviewed.

According to Jones, a study of anti-bullying applications to the Fair Work Commission several years ago found that in 70 per cent of the cases, employers hadn't followed their own grievance procedures.
- Providing training** on bullying, standards of behaviour and reporting procedures allows workers to form adequate responses when issues arise.

Management training is vital because middle managers spend a quarter of their time on conflict management and need the skills to be effective.

Jones advises employers to consult the Comcare document, Working well: An organisational approach to preventing psychological injury, for guidance on risk management for stress and psychological injury in the workplace.

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