

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY

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BACKGROUND

I would like to begin my paper by firstly exploring some of the history behind occupational health and safety as we know it today.

The origins of concern for health and safety in the work place can be traced back to Britain when in 1844 the Factories Act received Royal assent and became law. The necessity for this Act was primarily due to the industrial revolution going on at that time in Britain, which saw larger and more dangerous machinery being developed and hence a need for legislative measures to protect those using these machines.

As time progressed so the sophistication of industrial processes also progressed.

AUSTRALIAN LEGISLATIVE APPROACH

Here in Australia much of our legislation is modelled on that used in Britain, and legislation in the area of occupational health and safety is no exception. As mentioned previously the first Act developed was the Factories Act of 1844. Similar legislation soon came into force throughout Australia under in some cases similar or in others slightly different names.

It is interesting to note that as early as 1917 insurance companies in America were refusing to insure people who worked with asbestos because they knew it involved high risk.

The status quo remained virtually unchanged until arguably one of the most important reports since the Factories Act was introduced, the Robbins Committee Report¹ of 1972 was handed down. This report led to the drafting and subsequent Royal assent of the Health and Safety at Work Act of 1974² in Britain. This act has been used as a basis for the drafting of all of the Australian acts that deal with occupational health and safety.

It is interesting to note that in the financial year 1989-90 the cost of workers compensation claims in Australia amounted to \$4.8 billion dollars or 1.3% of non-farm GDP³, a tremendous burden on the community.

The prevention of occupational injury and disease should not rely only upon the use of the "big brother" approach; it is also a matter of education, training and commitment. These areas have been addressed to varying degrees by each of the Australian Acts. I have included the titles of the principal occupational health

and safety Acts at the rear of this paper as Appendix One for further reference.

Because I am familiar with the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Act (1985)⁴ I will from now on be using this as the base act throughout this paper. Similar Acts exist in other states and these should be consulted for varying local considerations that may be applicable.

VICTORIAN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH ACT

This Act is the principal Act dealing with occupational health and safety in Victoria. It is divided up into a number of sections each of which deals with different aspects of occupational health and safety. The operation of the Act is overseen by the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Commission. Similar bodies exist in all of the other states and further details can be found in Appendix Two at the end of the paper.

The Act places a responsibility on all manufacturers and suppliers of equipment, employers, owners, bodies corporate and individuals to ensure that equipment, materials and processes used in the work place are safe and present no hazard when utilised.

The penalties for non-compliance with the act can be up to a fine of \$250 000, two years jail or both for any offence found in breach of the act. In addition to the Act, common law provisions also apply with certain limitations to the area of occupational health and safety.

APPLICATION OF THE ACT TO MUSEUMS

Because the Act is designed primarily for situations where paid labour is employed application of the Act to museums is limited where volunteer labour is used. However, it is directly applicable where either paid employees or contractors are involved in museum activities.

This should not, in my opinion, mean that certain provisions of the Act should not be also applied where volunteer labour is involved. For example it is just as easy for a museum volunteer who is filing an asbestos electrical arc chute to breath in an asbestos fibre and develop asbestosis as it is for a person employed by the Public Transport Corporation and engaged in identical work to breath in the fibre and develop asbestosis.

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act various Regulations and Codes of Practice have been developed for use in industry. Whilst the regulations

are mandatory the Codes of Practice are designed as a guide only. They can and have been cited in prosecutions by the Department of Labour as minimum standards. It would be wise for us, as tramway museums, to keep abreast of and implement these as minimum standards in our museum operations.

As can be seen by viewing the information contained in Appendix Three, a great variety of areas are covered by these Codes of Practice. Various standards published by the Standards Association of Australia are also applicable to certain situations in which museums are likely to be involved. There is also large range of commercial literature available in the area of occupational health and safety and I have listed some useful and relevant titles in Appendix Four.

Assistance and information on many aspects and occupational health and safety problems can also be obtained from the various authorities that oversee the occupational health and safety acts in each state.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR MUSEUMS

As museums we are attempting to preserve our trams in first class operating conditions so that future generations will be able to ride and view them just as we have had the opportunity to do. We should however not be attempting to use ancient and dangerous practices in the preservation of the trams.

An example to illustrate what I am talking about is the electric cables used to control the power within a tram. No one in their right mind would use the original vulcanised india rubber insulated cable when rebuilding or restoring a tram in this day and age when far more modern and safer cables are available.

The first and most important occupational health and safety consideration by a museum, therefore, should be a commitment by the Board of Management to creating a safe and efficient working environment for all members and others who are involved in museum activities. Accidents and injury do not just happen. They are the result of the actions of people and a given set of circumstances. Just as a fire needs both fuel and oxygen to continue to burn so does it take both a person and a given circumstance for an accident or injury to occur.

Having made this commitment, questions such as the following should be asked:

1. Do we have a person who looks after safety matters at our museum?
2. Do we have a reporting system in place to record and follow up any accidents or near miss incidents?
3. Do we have written procedures in place for activities that our members undertake on behalf of our museum?

4. Do we have adequate first aid facilities at the museum?
5. Is our fire protection equipment adequate?
6. How do we store our flammable material such as oils, paints and solvents?
7. Do we store our spare parts and equipment in an accessible manner?
8. How often do we review our procedures?
9. Do we have a list of emergency phone numbers available?
10. Are all of our machines fitted with correct guards?
11. Do we have any necessary personal protective equipment available for use at our museum?
12. Do we carry out regular safety audits of our museum site?
13. Do we have copies of the material safety data sheets for each of the chemicals, solvents and paints used at our museum?

Whilst you may think that dealing with matters of occupational health and safety are time consuming and an added expense on museums, this is not the case.

Imagine the situation where one of your museum's historic or newly restored tramcars burns to the ground through lack of proper fire protection; or a situation where a museum member injures themselves and inadequate first aid facilities are available.

What would you say, or more importantly how would you feel, being in the situation yourself? What would you say to defend your museum in a common law court case where a member was suing your society for an obvious case of negligence?

Proper care and planning can also lead to improvements in productivity and in cost savings which will assist all involved in your museum.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to illustrate that as museums we are involved in a highly industrial environment and therefore the occupational health and safety of both members and our paying visitors should be of prime importance to us all.

Occupational health and safety should be yet another area in which, as museums, we strive for excellence. Through commitment, careful planning, critical analysis of what we are striving for and the way we are going about achieving our goals, we can achieve this excellence.

Observance of the legislative framework that is in place together with use of the Codes of Practice and appropriate Australian Standards will go a long way to ensuring that we reach this very important goal, allowing our museums to be run effectively, safely and efficiently.

REFERENCES

1. Robbins Committee Report 1972, H.M.S.O. London 1972.
2. Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, H.M.S.O. London 1974.
3. The Review of Occupational Health and Safety in Australia, Australian Government Publishing Service 1990.
4. The Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985, Victorian Government Printer.

APPENDIX 1

The principal Occupational Health & Safety Acts correct to December 1991 are:

New South Wales

The Occupational Health & Safety Act 1983

Victoria

The Occupational Health & Safety Act 1985

Queensland

The Workplace Health & Safety Act

South Australia

The Occupational Health, Safety & Welfare Act 1986

Western Australia

The Occupational Health, Safety & Welfare Act 1984

Tasmania

The Industrial Safety, Health & Welfare Act 1977

Australian Capital Territory

The Occupational Health & Safety Act 1989

Northern Territory

The Work Health Act 1986

APPENDIX 2

The Government authorities responsible for occupational health & safety within Australia correct to December 1991 are;

New South Wales

WorkCover Authority
1 Rosebery Ave
Rosebery 2018 Ph. 697 8333

Victoria

Victorian Occupational Health & Safety Commission
80 Collins St
Melbourne 3000 Ph. 655 6444

Queensland

Division of Accident Prevention
Department of Education, Vocational Education,
Training & Industrial Relations
State Law Building
50 Ann St
Brisbane 4000 Ph. 239 3111

South Australia

South Australian Occupational Health & Safety
Commission
Henry Waymouth Building
100 Waymouth St
Adelaide 5000 Ph. 226 3120

Western Australia

Department of Occupational Health, Safety & Welfare
"Westcentre"
1260 Hay St
Perth 6000 Ph. 327 8777

Tasmania

Department of Labour & Industry
81 - 89 Brisbane St
Hobart 7000 Ph. 33 7657

Australian Capital Territory

Private Sector Occupational Health & Safety Section
Industrial Relations Branch
A.C.T. Administration
(Address Unknown)

Northern Territory

Work Health Authority
66 The Esplanade
Darwin 0800 Ph. 89 5511

APPENDIX 3

The following Codes of Practice are in use current to October 1991;

National Codes

- Prevention and Management of Occupational Overuse Syndrome
- Safe Removal of Asbestos
- Safe Handling of Timber Preservatives & Treated Timber
- Safe Use of Vinyl Chloride
- Manual Handling
- Safe Use of Synthetic Mineral Fibres
- Control of Workplace Hazardous Substances

New South Wales

- Garbage Compactors
- Tunnel Construction
- Manual Handling
- Farm Silos & Field Bins

Victoria

- Workplaces
- First Aid in the Workplace
- Foundries
- Lead Control
- Manual Handling
- Manual Handling in the Furniture Removal Industry
- Manual Handling (Occupational Overuse Syndrome)
- Safety Precautions in Trenching Operations
- Temporary Electrical Installations on Building & Construction Sites Tilt-up Constructions
- Safe Work on Roofs (Excluding Villa Constructions)
- Safe Use of Cranes in the Building & Construction Industry
- Safety in Forest Operations
- Building & Construction Workplaces
- Demolition

Queensland

- Manual Handling
- Manual Handling (Building)
- Workplace Amenities
- Project Amenities Safe Design & Operation of Tractors
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Steel Construction (High Rise)

South Australia

- Safe Removal of Asbestos
- Manual Handling
- Safe Use of Synthetic Mineral Fibres
- Safe Handling of Timber Preservatives & Treated Timber
- Safe Erection of Structural Steelwork

- First Aid in the Workplace
- Logging Stanchions & Bulkheads
- Chainsaw - Safety Requirements
- Brush Cutters - Safety Requirements

Western Australia

- Safe Work on Roofs
- Hepatitis B & HIV/AIDS
- Prevention & Control of Legionnaires Disease
- Styrene in the Fibreglass Industry Noise Control in the Workplace
- Manual Handling

Australian Capital Territory

- Manual Handling

Northern Territory

- First Aid in the Workplace

APPENDIX 4

The following selected references would prove useful in the field of occupational health & safety:

Accident Prevention

International Labour Organisation 1986

Health & Safety at Work

John Mathews

Pluto Press 1985

Work Health Makes Work Sense

Damien J. Smith

Enterprisecare 1989

Planning Occupational Safety & Health

CCH Australia

3rd Edition 1991

Guidebook to Australian Occupational Health & Safety Laws

Adrian Brooks

CCH Australia

3rd Edition 1988

Managing Occupational Health & Safety in Australia

Quinlan & Boyle

MacMillan Australia 1991

Australia Standard A.S. 1470 - 1986 Health & Safety at Work - Principles & Practises

Standards Association of Australia 1986

Manual of Industrial Personal Protection

Standards Association of Australia 1986

Australian Standard A.S. 1885.1 - 1990

Work Place Injury & Disease Recording Standard

Standards Association of Australia 1990