

The Difference Between Health and Safety Representatives and Committees

Health and safety representatives (HSRs)

are elected to represent workers in a 'work group' on health and safety matters.

HSRs facilitate the flow of information about health and safety between the business (or employer or other PCBU) and the workers.

They monitor the health and safety actions taken by the business, investigate workers' complaints and look into anything that might be a risk to the health and safety of the workers they represent.

If a HSR has completed approved HSR training they can also direct unsafe work to stop when they have a reasonable concern that carrying out the work would expose a worker to a serious risk.

A direction to stop work can only be given if the issue has not been resolved by consultation (unless the risk is so serious that it's unreasonable to consult first).

HSRs can also issue a 'Provisional Improvement Notice' (PIN) when they reasonably believe there is a contravention of the Work Health and Safety Act 2011.

Health and safety

committees allow businesses (and other PCBUs) to work together with workers on health and safety matters.

The main functions of the health and safety committee are to:

- facilitate co-operation in instigating, developing and carrying out measures to improve the health and safety of workers
- assist in developing health and safety standards, rules and procedures



AMWU

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union
PO Box 167, Granville, NSW, 2142
9897-4200
HelpDesk: 1300 732 698
www.amwu.org.au

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Health and safety representatives

The powers and functions of HSRs are to:

- represent the workers in their work group in relation to work health and safety matters
- monitor the measures taken by the PCBU to comply with the WHS Act in relation to their work group members
- investigate complaints from work group members about work health and safety
- inquire into anything that appears to be a risk to the health or safety of work group members, arising from the conduct of the business or undertaking. In exercising a power or performing a function, HSRs may:
 - inspect the workplace where their work group works at any time after giving reasonable notice to the PCBU
 - inspect the workplace where their work group works at any time without notice in the event of an incident or any situation involving a serious risk to the health or safety of a person emanating from an immediate or imminent exposure to a hazard
 - accompany an inspector during an inspection of any part of the workplace where their work group works. Inspectors must, as soon as practicable after entering a workplace, take reasonable steps to notify the relevant PCBU as well as any HSRs of the entry
 - attend interviews between one or more work group members and an inspector or the PCBU. For example, interviews may be required after an incident has occurred, for return-to-work purposes or as part of issue resolution processes. A HSR can only attend interviews with the consent of the worker and the interview must be about work health and safety matters
- request the establishment of a HSC
- receive information concerning the work health and safety of workers in the work group
- whenever necessary, request the assistance of any person (union)
- in some circumstances, direct a work group member to cease unsafe work or issue a Provisional Improvement Notice (PIN)
- in some circumstances, request a review of a control measure where the duty holder has not adequately reviewed the control measure as required under the WHS Regulations.

The powers and functions are intended to enable HSRs to effectively represent the interests of the members of their work group and to contribute to work health and safety matters. The WHS Act does not impose mandatory obligations or duties on HSRs

Health and safety committees

The functions HSCs can perform are broad. HSCs can consider the management of health and safety across the whole workforce. In this way, the activities of the HSC can complement the role of the HSRs, whose powers are usually limited to issues affecting their particular work group.

HSC functions include:

- facilitating co-operation between the PCBU and workers to instigate, develop and carry out measures to secure the work health and safety of workers
- assisting in developing health and safety standards, rules and procedures that will be followed or complied with at the workplace
- other functions agreed by the PCBU and members of the HSC.



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