

Your health and
safety guide to

Workplace amenities and first aid



If this Subject Guide does not contain an up-to-date *More information* sheet, please go to www.worksafe.vic.gov.au to download the PDF or contact us on 1800 136 089 to request a printed copy.

There's plenty more information
about health and safety...
www.worksafe.vic.gov.au
1800 136 089

Providing proper amenities and first aid are essential parts of workplace health and safety.

Every workplace needs to have adequate amenities to provide for the welfare and hygiene needs of employees and any contractors they hire.

Providing adequate first aid arrangements protects health and safety in case something goes wrong or someone gets ill at work.

The guide will help you understand what has to be done about amenities and first aid at your workplace.



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About the issue

Workplace amenities and first aid

Amenities are facilities essential for the welfare or personal hygiene needs of employees. They prevent the spread of germs and disease, prevent ill health from exposure to contamination and meet the basic human needs of employees.

Workplace amenities include toilets, shelter sheds, seating, dining rooms, change rooms, drinking water, personal storage and washing facilities.

Amenities must be kept clean, secure and maintained in good working order.

First aid

The provision of first aid facilities is necessary to protect the health and safety of workers in the event that they are injured or become ill at work.

Provision of first aid means providing first aid kits and, depending on the workplace, having a trained first aid officer(s), a first aid room(s) or an OHS or medical centre.

What are the risks?

Every workplace is different, so you need to know how to spot potential problems in your workplace and what to do about them.

Some jobs are more obviously dangerous than others, such as construction, mining or working with chemicals, machinery and electricity.

Failure to provide proper workplace amenities places workers at risk of infection, illness and injury through exposure to germs, contaminants and extreme weather conditions. Adequate workplace amenities can also go some way to controlling the risks of dehydration, musculoskeletal disorders, fatigue and stress.

The impact of a workplace injury or illness can be far greater if workers do not have immediate access to first aid facilities and treatment. Effective first aid can save lives and limit the impact and severity of workplace injuries and illnesses.

Your legal duties

The law

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act)

The OHS Act came into effect on 1 July 2005. It sets out the key principles, duties and rights in relation to occupational health and safety. The duties imposed by the Act cover a wide variety of circumstances, recognising the need for a duty-holder to have flexibility in determining what needs to be done to comply.

The OHS Act is based upon the following key health and safety principles:

- All people – employees and the general public – should have the highest level of protection against risks to health and safety.
- Those who manage or control things that create health and safety risks in the workplace are responsible for eliminating or reducing the risks, so far as is reasonably practicable.
- Employers should be proactive in promoting health and safety in the workplace.
- Information and ideas about risks and how to control them should be shared between employers and employees.
- Employees are entitled – and should be encouraged – to be represented in relation to health and safety issues.

Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007 (OHS Regulations 2007)

New Regulations for occupational health and safety came into effect on 1 July 2007. The OHS Regulations are intended to protect Victorian workers from health and safety risks.



Employers

By law, employers must provide a safe working environment for their workers, as far as reasonably practicable. This includes providing adequate facilities and first aid for the welfare of workers at the workplace.

Other obligations include:

- monitoring conditions at the workplace, including your workers' health, and keeping appropriate records
- providing workers with enough information, training and supervision to do their job safely, including information in other languages where appropriate
- consulting workers and their health and safety representatives on issues that could affect their health or safety.

Employees

Employees have specific legal duties relating to health and safety in the workplace. These include:

- taking reasonable care for their own health and safety
- taking reasonable care for the health and safety of others who may be affected by their work
- cooperating with their employer's efforts to make the workplace safe
- not intentionally or recklessly interfering with or misusing anything at the workplace that could affect health or safety.

Your legal duties continued

Cooperating with your employer on workplace health and safety issues may mean:

- following safety policies and procedures
- using machinery and equipment properly
- participating in hazard identification and reporting
- resolving issues as they arise
- attending training and following the instructions given
- using personal protective equipment provided by your employer
- participating in consultation.

You can also help your employer make the workplace safer by notifying them of any risks that you see.

Compliance and enforcement

WorkSafe applies a strategy of 'constructive compliance' – a combination of incentives and deterrents – to improve workplace health and safety.

This strategy recognises that real and sustainable improvement in workplace health and safety requires active involvement from employers and employees in identifying hazards and controlling risks.

WorkSafe inspectors have the primary role of targeting unsafe workplace activity, enforcing compliance with health and safety laws, and providing guidance and advice on how to comply with those laws.

Further information on workplace inspections and WorkSafe's enforcement policy is available through the WorkSafe Advisory Service (1800 136 089) or at www.worksafe.vic.gov.au

How to comply

WorkSafe has a range of guidance materials to advise on the required processes and actions that duty-holders must take in order to meet their legal obligations. *Compliance Codes*, *Health and Safety Solutions* and *Guidance Notes* each provide detailed and specific advice for duty-holders seeking to comply with the OHS Regulations. See also the enclosed *More information* sheet for a listing of guidance materials related to Workplace amenities and first aid.

Consult

Employees' expertise can make a significant contribution to improving workplace health and safety.

Regular, proactive consultation can help identify issues in the workplace and build a strong commitment to health and safety by including all views in the decision-making process.

Under the OHS Act, employers must consult with employees when identifying and assessing hazards or risks, making decisions about risk control, and when making decisions about amenities and first aid.

'Employees' includes independent contractors (and any employees of the independent contractor(s)) who perform work which the employer has, or should have, control over.

If employees are represented by health and safety representatives, the consultation must involve those representatives – see *Your health and safety guide to Consultation* for further information.

How to comply continued

Workplace amenities

The law requires employers to provide adequate facilities for employees at the workplace, such as toilets, dining areas and drinking water.

What facilities do I need to have?

To some extent, the facilities you need to provide will depend on your industry and business activities. Talk to employees and health and safety representatives about their needs, taking into account:


- the size and location of the workplace (including whether it's in a remote area)
- the number of employees and the numbers of men and women
- the type of work done at the workplace (including whether indoors or outdoors)
- whether travel is involved and how much
- the distance to the nearest facilities.

Facilities should ensure adequate privacy and security for all employees. People with disabilities or special needs should be provided with appropriate amenities.

Types of facilities

All workplaces need to have:

- drinking water – an adequate supply of clean drinking water should be accessible to all employees and located away from bathroom areas
- toilets – these must be kept clean and employees must have access to them at all times
- washing facilities – including soap and hygienic drying facilities located in or near toilet areas
- dining areas – workers need access to a hygienic area for eating meals while at work. The facilities in the dining area will depend on the workplace, but generally should include tables and chairs, fridges, sinks and hot and cold running water.



Depending on your work, you may also need to provide:

- change rooms – particularly if workers need to change clothes/uniform before or after work, or where special provision has to be made for changing and laundering work clothes due to exposure to lead or asbestos, or to other contaminants, such as from contaminated soil
- showers – where possible, these should be separate for men and women, and privacy must be assured in all cases
- storage facilities – lockers or other secure storage may be needed for personal protective clothing and equipment, and for employees' personal belongings.

Are my facilities adequate?

You need to review the facilities at your workplace regularly to ensure they are properly maintained and continue to adequately meet employees' needs.

Example: If you take on more staff, you may need to provide additional seating or larger storage areas.

First aid

First aid facilities should be available at all times where there are people at work. If an incident occurs that results in injury, first aid can help reduce the severity of the injury and, in extreme cases, a quick response could mean the difference between life and death.

Employee awareness

The provision of information on first aid in the workplace should be an integral part of the induction of employees. This should include the location of first aid kits and the names and locations of trained first aiders.

How to comply continued

What are my first aid needs?

No two workplaces are the same, so employers, in consultation with employees, need to assess their workplace to determine the first aid requirements appropriate for their situation.

Use a systematic approach, taking into account:

- the nature and hazards and the severity of the risk
- the size, layout and location of the workplace
- the number of employees and their work arrangements, including location, shift work, overtime and flexible hours
- access to medical services
- any previous injuries or illnesses.

First aid facilities

Depending on the information you collect, you'll need to provide some or all of the following:

- first aid kits – these should be clearly identifiable and well stocked, and the contents, number and location of kits should be determined having regard to the specific requirements of your workplace
- first aid rooms – these should be easily accessible, well lit, ventilated and temperature controlled, contain a sink or wash basin and a supply of running hot and cold water, as well as a means of boiling water, and should not be used for any other purposes
- first aid policies and procedures – which have been developed in consultation with staff.



Trained first aiders

The number of first aiders and training needs will vary between workplaces. As a general rule, persons designated as first aid officers will need to have undertaken training leading to a Senior First Aid certificate (Level 2 certificate).

Are my first aid facilities adequate?

You need to review your first aid requirements regularly, including the first aid training needs, to ensure they remain adequate and particularly whenever there are any changes to the workplace.

After any incident requiring first aid, you should record the details of any treatment given. You need to ensure that kits are checked and, if necessary, restocked.

GLOSSARY

Employee – A person employed under a contract of employment or contract of training.

Employer – A person who employs one or more people under contracts of employment or contracts of training.

First aid – Immediate emergency treatment given to an injured, wounded or sick person.

Hazard – A potential source of harm or injury. The potential to cause injury, illness or disease.

Health and safety representative (HSR) – A member of a designated work group elected to represent employees on matters relating to occupational health and safety.

Manual handling – Any activity requiring the use of force exerted by a person to lift, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain any object.

Plant – Any machinery, equipment, appliance, implement and tool; any component of any of these things; and anything fitted, connected or related to any of these things.

Reasonably practicable – See section 20(2) of the OHS Act and the WorkSafe Position on *How WorkSafe applies the law in relation to reasonably practicable*.

Workplace amenities – Facilities provided for the welfare and hygiene needs of employees.

In this series

Hazards

- Your health and safety guide to asbestos
- Your health and safety guide to confined spaces
- Your health and safety guide to dangerous goods
- Your health and safety guide to falls prevention
- Your health and safety guide to hazardous substances
- Your health and safety guide to lead
- Your health and safety guide to manual handling
- Your health and safety guide to noise
- Your health and safety guide to plant

Industries

- Your health and safety guide to construction
- Your health and safety guide to forestry
- Your health and safety guide to foundries
- Your health and safety guide to major hazard facilities
- Your health and safety guide to mines

Subjects

- Your health and safety guide to communicating across languages
- Your health and safety guide to consultation
- Your health and safety guide to controlling OHS hazards and risks
- Your health and safety guide to licensing and registrations
- Your health and safety guide to workplace amenities and first aid

Visit www.worksafe.vic.gov.au for online guidance on all of these topics and more...

The information presented in *Your health and safety guide to workplace amenities and first aid* is intended for general use only. It should not be viewed as a definitive guide to the law, and should be read in conjunction with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*.

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