TIP SHEET 3

Implementing a work-related stress risk management process

As well as an important legal duty, risk management for work-related stress can be an organisational improvement strategy.

There have been a number of conditions found to be critical to the success of this kind of intervention:

1. visible organisational and management commitment to dealing with work-related stress
2. worker participation in all activities of stress management, including risk assessment or diagnosis, feedback, planning and implementing control options and interventions
3. organisational communication and consultation regarding the risk management process.

Commitment

Senior management commitment is critical to the success of any significant organisational initiative. Programs such as risk management require resources (people, money and time), but in the long term have been shown to make considerable savings in resources. They require the willing and appropriate commitment of these resources by management upfront.

Gaining worker commitment through frequent and open communication is also a necessary part of successfully changing worker attitudes and/or behaviour.

Participation, communication and consultation

The work health and safety legislation in NSW has a strong focus on consultation in risk management, which means that persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) are required to seek advice or information from the people involved with the risks in the workplace. When it comes to managing the risks of work-related stress, you will be particularly dependent upon input from your workers to identify and address stressors at work and will see clear benefits from communicating with, and involving them in the process.

Consulting with workers at each stage of the risk management process will assist in achieving better health and safety outcomes because:

- Workers are in constant close contact with the day-to-day elements of the workplace and the work that can increase the risk of work-related stress – consulting with them will give you access to their first-hand experience.

- Seeking assistance from the workers will encourage them to accept and comply with the solutions that are to be put in place.

- Workers can experience stress if they perceive that they have little control over their work and their work environment, and do not feel supported in their workplace – communicating with them and seeking their participation in the risk management process very directly addresses the risk factors of low control and poor support. In this way the consultation process itself becomes part of the solution.

Ways to facilitate participation and consultation

The *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* formally provides for consultation through workplace health and safety representatives and committees, where these are required in your workplace.

As well as using workplace health and safety representatives and committees, you can set up a specific communication and project management structure to oversee and implement the risk management process. This structure might include a senior steering committee and/or a working group.

Senior steering committee

A senior steering committee is a group of individuals drawn from those in senior management positions and strategic areas of the PCBU, such as human resources, workplace health and safety and organisational communication, who are responsible for general operating policy, procedures and related matters affecting the PCBU as a whole. It includes a 'project champion', who heads the committee and gives the project momentum. The purpose of a senior steering committee is to:

- provide overall guidance and direction for a project and to interface with the PCBU at a senior level about the project
- provide tangible evidence of management support.

PCBUs may want to consider establishing a steering committee to oversee the stress risk management process and to ensure that the recommendations for changes are implemented strategically and earnestly.

Working group

The working group includes the people who more actively facilitate the process on the ground. Working groups are an effective way of carrying out a potentially large-scale strategic process like work-related stress risk management. They encourage full and active participation by the workers in the risk management process.

The working group can:
- encourage worker participation
- discuss perceptions and perspectives on work practices
- coordinate focus group discussions or the distribution of surveys
- review the results of surveys and other information provided to confirm or challenge the responses
- analyse and prioritise areas where action is needed
- using a collaborative approach involving workers and managers, develop an action plan to address the identified causes of work related stress
- report to the Senior Steering Committee.

Feedback of results of the risk assessment

Providing feedback on the risk assessment to members of the PCBU is crucial. This step helps ensure information about risk factors is used in designing, implementing and evaluating appropriate interventions.

Feedback may focus initially on the project champion and steering committee or working group, with discussions on how the results could be best positioned and presented. However this process should not be restricted to this group alone, with the promise of wider feedback an important factor in securing worker commitment to any interventions or risk reduction activities.

It is also important to seek worker input into the designing, implementing and evaluating of any control measures for managing risks associated with work-related stress.

This tip sheet is one of 12 that refer to work-related stress. For more detail, go to workcover.nsw.gov.au

1. Overview of work-related stress
2. A risk management approach to work-related stress
3. Implementing a work-related stress risk management process
4. Risk factors for work-related stress
5. Work demands and work-related stress
6. Levels of control and work-related stress
7. Support from supervisors and/or co-workers regarding work-related stress
8. Role clarity, role conflict and work-related stress
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11. Managing change and work-related stress
12. Organisational justice and work-related stress

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