Work Health and Safety Practitioner

Reading

GENERAL WHS INFORMATION SOURCES

January 2012
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Department of Commerce

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The SafetyLine Institute material has been prepared and published as part of Western Australia's contribution to national work health and safety skills development.

www.worksafe.wa.gov.au/institute

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OVERVIEW

This reading will give you an insight into the types of general WHS resources available and how these can be accessed.

Objectives

After reading this information you should be able to:

- differentiate the type of resources available; and
- identify the documents that will provide the answers to specific queries.

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Revised and updated by Judith Abbott
Section 1: INTRODUCTION

**Glossary of terms**

When they are first used, glossary terms are indicated with an asterisk (*). Make sure that you are familiar with the **Glossary of terms** before going any further.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Bibliographic database</strong></th>
<th>Provides access to the literature of a specific subject. Usually includes books, journal articles, conference proceedings, reports and government publications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ISSN</strong></td>
<td>International Standard Serial Number. A unique 8 digit code assigned to a specific journal title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journal</strong></td>
<td>A specialised periodical containing scholarly articles. Usually written by specialists in a subject field and issued by a professional society or institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Periodical</strong></td>
<td>Publications issued in successive parts bearing numerical or chronological designations that appear at regular intervals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard</strong></td>
<td>Documents that set out minimum requirements. National WHS standards are declared by Safe Work Australia and most deal with the elimination, reduction, or management of specific workplace hazards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Website</strong></td>
<td>A collection of related, interlinked web pages, usually with a home page, accessible on the World Wide Web owned and managed by an organisation or company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.1 Access to WHS information is essential

Governments have been concerned about the number of deaths and injuries in the workplace and the social costs to the community and have sought to reduce the workplace risks to work health and safety (WHS) in a variety of ways, for instance, by legislation, education and by providing training.

Workplace injury and disease can be dramatically reduced by good risk management. In order to have good risk management, it is essential for the business or undertaking and workers to have access to WHS information. There is a wealth of information available in this field, the problem being how and where to find it. Furthermore, WHS covers a number of sciences and to find information it is necessary to look at a variety of subjects such as occupational medicine, industrial hygiene, toxicology and ergonomics.

The aim of this reading is to give an insight into the types of WHS resources available and how these can be accessed.

1.2 Subject headings

When searching bibliographic databases and library collections you will notice they use subject headings. Becoming familiar with these subjects heading or descriptors may assist you to find relevant information quickly. The two key WHS thesauri are:


- CISTHES Occupational Safety and Health Thesaurus
  International Labour Organization
Section 2: LEGAL INFORMATION

Most of the publications that fall in this category are issued by regulatory bodies such as the government departments responsible for administering the legislation, and agencies responsible for standard setting.

### 2.1 Legislation

The Australian Government has identified WHS as a priority area for reform. One of the key elements of the WHS reform agenda is harmonisation – moving towards one set of national WHS laws.

Safe Work Australia is responsible for developing national model WHS legislation. The model legislation will consist of a principal WHS Act, supported by model regulations and model codes of practice that can be readily adopted around Australia. This requires each state and territory to pass their own laws that mirror the model WHS laws and adopt them by December 2011.

Go to the website of your regulatory authority to access the legislation applicable to your jurisdiction.

### 2.2 Standards

Standards referred to in legislation are documents that set out minimum requirements. The key agencies responsible for setting standards in Australia are Standards Australia and Safe Work Australia. Examples of international or other national standards setting bodies are the British Standards Institute, and the International Standards Organisation. All standards issued by these bodies can be purchased from their local offices or their appointed agents. These organisations also have home pages on the Internet with links to their catalogues and information on how to place orders online. Good WHS libraries, such as the WorkSafe WA Library, subscribe to Australian Standards online and have some hard copies in their collection.
National Standards

Standards Australia can be located on the Internet at:
www.standards.org.au

Some standards are adopted in legislation giving them a legal status under WHS regulations, for example:

- AS 1319 : 1994 Safety signs for the occupational environment
- AS/NZS 2865 : 2001 Safe working in a confined space

Examples of Australian standards relevant to WHS legislation are:

- AS 2444 : 2001 Portable fire extinguishers and fire blankets – selection and location
- AS/NZS 4576 : 1995 Guidelines for scaffolding

International Standards

For international standards and their Internet sites go to:

- International Standards Organisation: www.iso.org
- International Electrotechnical Commission: www.iec.ch
- British Standards Institute: www.bsi-global.com

Examples of international standards:

- ISO 5131-1996 Acoustics - tractors and machinery for agriculture and forestry - measurement of noise at operator's position
- BS 7255-2001 Code of practice for safe working on lifts

2.3 Codes of practice

A code of practice is a document prepared for the purpose of providing practical guidance on acceptable ways of achieving compliance with statutory duties and regulatory requirements.
Codes of practice:

- should be followed, unless there is another solution which achieves the same or better result; and
- can be used to support prosecution for non-compliance.

Codes of practice, like the standards, have a legal status when adopted in legislation.

Go to the website of your regulatory authority to access the codes of practice applicable to your jurisdiction.

**National (Australia)**

Safe Work Australia is responsible for developing model codes of practice that can be readily adopted around Australia.

All national model codes of practice can be found at: www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au

**International (HSE)**

- Control of lead at work
- Managing health & safety in construction

### 2.4 Guidance notes

Guidance notes are explanatory documents providing detailed information on the requirements of legislation, regulations, standards, codes of practice or matters relating to WHS.

Examples of guidance notes are:

**State (Western Australia)**

- The general duty of care in Western Australian Workplaces
- Formal consultative processes at the workplace
National (Australia)

- Guidance note for the prevention of occupational overuse syndrome in keyboard employment [NOHSC : 3005 (1996)]
- Guidance note for the assessment of health risks arising from hazardous substances in the workplace [NOHSC: 3017 (1994)]

International (HSE)

- Managing shift work: Health and safety guidance
- Assessing and managing risks at work from skin exposure to chemical agents – guidance for employers and health and safety specialists
Section 3: BOOKS AND PERIODICALS

Books on occupational medicine, ergonomics, industrial hygiene, noise, toxicology and other subjects are widely used to improve workplace health and safety. Written by specialists in their field, they provide comprehensive and often complex technical guidance and advice for work health and safety professionals. Many are available in both print and electronic (e-book) format. These will be available from a good WHS library, such as the WorkSafe WA Library.

Here is a selection of the some of the authoritative or “classic” WHS books.

3.1 Reference books

Encyclopaedias

- *ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety.*

This is a 4 volume, concise, easy-to-understand reference work on almost every topic related to work health and safety and is written by specialists. Most articles describe the health hazards and give an account of the safety measures that should be taken. This is now also freely available via the Internet as part of the ILO safework bookshelf.

http://www.ilo.org/safework_bookshelf/english?d&nd=170000102&nh=0
**Glossaries and dictionaries**


**3.2 General books**

**Occupational Medicine**

Ergonomics


Industrial Hygiene and Toxicology

- 2011 TLVs and BEIs based on the documentation of the threshold limit values for chemical and physical agents and biological exposure indices. Cincinnati, Ohio: ACGIH, 2011

Safety
- Safety culture : assessing and changing the behaviour of organisations. Taylor, J.B. Farnham, Surrey: Gower, 2010

Noise


• Handbook of noise induced hearing loss: prevention and rehabilitation. Barber, A. Canberra: AGPS, 1992

Periodicals

Journals, newsletters and mailing lists are an excellent source of up-to-date information because of the frequency of publication. Information in books takes time to be written and published while journal articles can report more quickly on new developments and current trends. Journals also contain useful information in the form of reviews for books, software and websites, news items and announcements of conferences and seminars. Subscriptions to most journals and newsletters can be either in print or electronic format. While journals usually have scientific/technical content, others are more practical and can be a useful source of trade information such as advertisements and product news.

There are many journals and newsletters available at good WHS libraries such as the WorkSafe WA Library: Here is a selection of the more popular WHS journals.

3.3 Journals

Australian

• Journal of Health, Safety and Environment. (ISSN 0029-7917) North Ryde, NSW: CCH Australia Ltd

• National Safety (ISSN 1445-9922) South Yarra, Vic.: National Safety Council of Australia
International

- *Accident analysis and prevention* (ISSN 0001-4575) Oxford: Pergamon Press
- *Health and Safety at Work* (ISSN 0141-8246) Croyden, Surrey: Reed Elsevier
- *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* (ISSN 1076-2752) Baltimore, MD: Williams & Wilkins
- *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* (ISSN 1351-0711) London: BMJ Publishing Group
- *Occupational Health* (ISSN 0029-7917) Sutton, Surrey: Reed Business Information
- *Occupational Medicine* (ISSN 1471-8405) Oxford: Oxford University Press
- *Professional Safety* (ISSN 0099-0027) Park Rige, Ill: American Society of Safety Engineers
- *RoSPA Occupational Safety and Health Journal* (ISSN 1474-7952) Birmingham: RoSPA
- *Safety and Health Practitioner* (ISSN 0958-479X) Borehamwood, Herts: Paramount Publishing
3.4 Newsletters

Newsletters are often the best sources of up-to-date information about recent developments in a particular field. Newsletters may report on changes to WHS legislation, current research, accidents, court proceedings, new work programs or work practices and include short articles on topical issues. They are sent as an email update often daily or weekly. Here is a selection of Australian newsletters.

- **Occupational Health News** (ISSN 1441-144X) Kew, Vic.: Thomson Reuters (Professional) Australia
- **OHS Alert (Fast independent new and analysis for workplace safety professionals)** Sydney; Specialist News
- **OHS bulletin (the plain English guide to workplace health and safety)** Melbourne: Crown Content
- **WorkplaceOHS (news and info for Australian OHS professionals)** North Sydney: Australian Business Pty Ltd.

3.5 e-Journals

Many magazines provided freely to the community are now available in electronic format. Here is a selection of Australian and International titles.

- **Asian-Pacific newsletter on occupational health and safety.** Finnish Institute of Occupational Health
- **Hazards magazine.** Trade Union Congress
- **Health and safety report** Canadian Centre for Occupational Safety and Health
  [http://www.ccohs.ca/newsletters/hsreport/issues/current.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/newsletters/hsreport/issues/current.html)
- **HesMag** European Trade Union Institute
  [http://www.etui.org/Topics/Health-Safety/HesaMag](http://www.etui.org/Topics/Health-Safety/HesaMag)
- **Magazine of the European Agency for Safety and Health at work.** EU-OSHA
• Regulation at work - newsletter. National Centre for Occupational Health and Safety Regulation

• Safe work Australian. Safe Work Australia
  http://safeworkaustralia.gov.au/AboutSafeWorkAustralia/WhatWeDo/Publications/Pages/QuickSearchResults.aspx?PublicationType=Newsletter

• Safety science monitor http://ssmon.chb.kth.se/

• Workplace issues magazine Workplace Standards Tasmania

• WorkSafe magazine Workers Compensation Board of British Columbia
  http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/newsletters/worksafe_magazine/default.asp

3.6 Subscribe to email alerts

All government work health and safety agencies provide a number of options to keep the community informed about their activities. Subscribing to an email update service will provide you with information about, new publications, amendments to legislation, safety alerts, incident reports, changes to the website, events and seminars.

• WorkSafe Western Australia

• Safe Work Australia

Go to the website of your regulatory authority to subscribe to email alerts relevant to your jurisdiction
Section 4: WEBSITES AND DATABASES

4.1 Websites

Websites are available freely on the Internet. Most government websites provide full text access to all their publications, legislation as well as a diverse range of WHS training resources often including films, podcasts, posters and PowerPoint presentations. The website of professional associations, research centres, trade unions, employers associations and universities can all be useful information sources.

There are many good directories providing comprehensive links to the constantly increasing list of WHS websites on the Internet:

- **WorkSafe Western Australia**

- **Canadian Centre for Occupational Safety and Health**
  [http://www.ccohs.ca/oshlinks/](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshlinks/)

- **Sheila Pantry and Associates – OSH World**

4.2 Databases

Bibliographic databases are collections of references to articles, reports and conference proceedings that can be searched using keywords, title, author details. They usually provide you with an abstract (summary) of the article or sometimes the complete article or report. Factual or direct databases are extensive collections of facts and data on a specialised subject. Among the factual database relevant to WHS are statistical, chemical, legal and standards databases. Many bibliographic databases are freely available to the public on the Internet, however, you sometimes need to pay a subscription to access databases providing access to standards, SDS and full text information.
Some of the databases useful in the WHS field are listed below. Databases not freely available online require a paid subscription or may be available to view from a good WHS library, such as the WorkSafe WA Library.

- **AUSTRALIAN BUILDING CODES BOARD** Provides access to the Building Code of Australia. *Subscription required.*
  

- **AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS (ABS)** Proves access to all ABS products and statistics. *Freely available online*  
  

- **AUSTLII** Australian Legal information Institute. Contains full text databases of most Australian court decisions and legislation. *Freely available online*  
  
  http://www.austlii.edu.au/

- **AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS** Full text access to Australian Standards. *Subscription required*  
  

- **CHEMWATCH** Comprehensive collection of safety data sheets (SDS) from Australia. Subscription required.  
  
  http://www.chemwatch.net/

- **CISDOC (ILO)** International labour Organization. Bibliographic database contains about 70,000 citations related to WHS. *Freely available online*  
  

- **COCHRANE DATABASE** Consists of a regularly updated collection of evidence-based medicine databases featuring over 1,000 journals and major reference books. *Freely available online*  
  
  http://www.thecochranelibrary.com/view/0/index.html

- **ELECTRONIC LIBRARY OF CONSTRUCTION OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH (eLOSH)** CPWR Center for Construction Research and Training. Provides a wide range of resource on construction safety and health. *Freely available*  
  
  http://www.elcosh.org/
• **HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES INFORMATION SYSTEM** Safe Work Australia. Provides information on hazardous substances that have been classified in accordance with the Approved Criteria for Hazardous Substances and the National Exposure Standards for Atmospheric Contaminants. *Freely available online* [http://hsis.ascc.gov.au/](http://hsis.ascc.gov.au/)

• **ILO SAFEWORK BOOKSHELF** International Labour Organization. Provides full text access to the ILO Occupational Health and Safety Encyclopaedia, International Chemical Safety Cards, ILO Conventions and Recommendations. *Freely available online* [http://www.ilo.org/safework_booksheelf/English](http://www.ilo.org/safework_booksheelf/English)

• **NIOSHTIC-2** U.S. National institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Bibliographic database contains around 47,000 citations related to occupational health and safety with full text access to NIOSH publications. *Freely available online* [www.cdc.gov/niosh](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh)

• **OSH UPDATE** Sheila Pantry Associates. Collection of over 20 bibliographic databases including some full text records relevant to WHS. *Subscription required.* [http://www.oshupdate.com/](http://www.oshupdate.com/)


• **SAFETYLIT** Centre for Injury Prevention Policy, San Diego State University. Database of citations related to injury prevention and safety promotion *Freely available online* [http://www.safetylit.org](http://www.safetylit.org)

4.3 Mailing lists

There are many mailing lists debating relevant topics on WHS. A comprehensive list of the addresses is produced by Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. The list is organised alphabetically and is maintained by the Canadian Centre. This is available at:

http://www.ccohs.ca/resources/listserv.html

KEY POINT

Safety officers who want to be kept up-to-date with the latest developments in WHS would read journals and newsletters, use the Internet and follow newsgroups.
SUMMARY

You have been introduced to a variety of information sources in different formats and you should now be able to differentiate between the types of resources available for your search needs. You should also be able to identify the type of documents that will provide the best answers to your queries.

This is just an overview of the sources of WHS information that are available. There is much more information on WHS which would be available from various institutions, universities, research centres, government departments and also on the Internet.

Your feedback

WorkSafe is committed to continuous improvement. If you take the time to complete the online Feedback Form at the SafetyLine Institute website you will assist us to maintain and improve our high standards.
REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

  http://www.worksafebc.com/about_us/library_services/assets/pdf/ohsguide.pdf

- Identifying and describing databases relevant to health and safety at work Surrey, Health and Safety Executive, 2011 (Research Report RR898)


- A practical guide for the use of research information to improve the quality of occupational health practice for occupational & public health professionals Verbeek, J. and van Dijk, F.
  http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/pwh7elr.pdf