

One-stop safety shop

For water industry workers

Councils and contractors are working together for safer workplaces – and to help meet the challenges of new legislation, a one-stop shop for health and safety information is now being developed, as **Lesley Smith** explains.

In 2013, the Independent Taskforce on Workplace Health and Safety reported that New Zealand's work health and safety system was failing. As a result, New Zealand underwent its most significant workplace health and safety reforms in 20 years which led to the formation of WorkSafe and the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA).

Many water, wastewater owners, contractors and suppliers around the country have been proactive in adapting their health and safety systems to changes in the Act. There is also a plethora of guidance and tools that have been developed to help these organisations comply with the new legislation and ensure we have healthy and safe work environments.

However, the changes have thrown up significant challenges for time-poor operational and management staff in the water industry in not only locating information but determining what is relevant. The Water New Zealand Water Services Managers Group (WSMG) thinks this could be made easier.

In response, the group is developing a new one-stop shop for providing key information.

The health and safety project will collate information and learnings from industry leaders, provide access to existing advice, and identify and plug any remaining knowledge gaps through a central resource that can be used by contractors and system owners alike.

DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL GUIDELINES

The aim is to collate a set of national guidance for the water industry on health and safety. The last time such guidance material was produced was 2001. The project will also collate resources from existing Water Services Managers initiatives including guidelines on Chlorine Emergency Response Planning, and Health and Safety aspects of Asbestos Cement pipes.

ADVISORY GROUP

An advisory group of Water New Zealand members is overseeing the development of the project. The group consists of senior staff and health and safety experts from Veolia, Downer, Watercare, BPO, Hastings, and Dunedin City council, all of whom have volunteered their time to advance the way our industry addresses health and safety.

INFORMATION ACCESS

Much of the existing guidance on health and safety can be accessed electronically. Accordingly, the framework will be

delivered on a web-based portal to provide easy access, and dynamic material for 3 Waters staff from across the industry.

IMPLICATIONS OF ACT

The HSWA came into force on 4 April 2016. Here are some of the most significant features for our industry.

WORKING TOGETHER

The HSWA Act strives to promote a concept of working together to ensure worker safety. With many contractors involved in the delivery of water and wastewater services, this has big implications for both project delivery and operations.

The new law essentially requires people to think and communicate about safety aspects faced in their everyday work activities. It requires cooperation, communication and coordination amongst all entities involved in design, manufacture, construction, implementation, maintenance, operation and removal and disposal of water, wastewater and stormwater services.

PERSONS CONDUCTING A BUSINESS OR UNDERTAKING

The HSWA introduces new categories of "duty holders", with different but overlapping responsibilities. The primary duty holder is a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU). This can be an individual, but will typically be an organisation such as a territorial authority, council-controlled organisation, or consulting business.

A PCBU has a duty to ensure any workplace under its control or management is without health and safety risks to any person, so far as is reasonably practicable. These duties apply irrespective of the location of the workplace. PCBUs must also consult with workers and others on health and safety matters. This means that both contractors and system owners are likely to have duties that extend beyond their office and direct reports.

SAFETY AND DESIGN

The new legislation has a heightened focus on safety in design; ensuring life-cycle safety is considered during the design of products and structures. It places a duty of care to consider all aspects of safety through the design, manufacture or construction, and use over its serviceable life and then its safe removal or demolition.

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EXISTING RESOURCES

There is no cookie-cutter approach to health and safety because each organisation has a different level of maturity, risk profile, relationships, risks and resourcing. However, there are a

number of themes and approaches that can be shared and a plethora of information and resources available. Some of our favourite sources are listed in the table. **WNZ**

AGENCY	RESOURCES	ACCESS
WorkSafe	A range of resources including: Meeting HSWA obligations, Confined spaces, Asbestos, Disaster recovery	business.govt.nz/worksafe
Environmental Protection Authority	Chemical handling and storage requirements	epa.govt.nz
Business Leaders Health & Safety Forum	Case studies and benchmarking tools for organisational leaders to improve health and safety	zeroharm.org.nz
Safe Work Australia	Guidance on the Principles of Safe Design for Work	safeworkaustralia.gov.au
Civil Contractors of New Zealand	ConstructSafe – A safety competency system for staff in the civil construction industry	constructionsafetycouncil.co.nz
Auckland Council	Best management practices for health and safety of stormwater systems	aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/environmentwaste/stormwater/Pages/stormwaterreferencelibrary

- *Updates on project development will be provided via the Water New Zealand website or contact Lesley.smith@waternz.org.nz for further detail.*