

# STRESSWISE – PREVENTING WORK-RELATED STRESS

A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

2ND EDITION  
APRIL 2007

## PUBLIC SECTOR AND COMMUNITY SERVICES



The information presented in *Stresswise – preventing work-related stress* 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*.

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of *Stresswise – preventing work-related stress*, the advice contained herein may not apply in every circumstance. Accordingly, the Victorian WorkCover Authority cannot be held responsible, and extends no warranties as to:

- the suitability of the information for any particular purpose;
- actions taken by third parties as a result of information contained in *Stresswise – preventing work-related stress*.

The information contained in this publication is protected by copyright. The Victorian WorkCover Authority hereby grants a non-exclusive licence in this publication to the recipient of this publication on the condition that it is not disseminated for profit. The Victorian WorkCover Authority encourages the free transfer, copying and printing of the information in this publication if such activities support the purposes and intent for which the publication was developed.

# PREFACE

Work-related stress is a growing problem around the world with increased demands for public services, work intensification, downsizing, outsourcing and globalisation creating pressures that affect the health and wellbeing of employees and the productivity of organisations.

Following musculoskeletal disorders, work-related stress is the second most common compensated illness/injury in Australia. During 2004/05 more than \$133.9 million was paid in benefits to workers who had made claims related to workplace stress. This picture is also reflected in Victoria where work-related stress, particularly in the public sector, has in recent times presented a growing percentage of workers compensation claims.

The indirect costs to people suffering from work-related stress, and their families and colleagues, make it clear that preventing stress needs to be addressed by Victorian industry and the broader community.

This guide provides practical advice to help public sector workplaces better understand their legal obligations for workplace consultation and the prevention of risks to psychological and physical health that arise from work-related stress.

WorkSafe's strategy for work-related stress incorporates prevention, assessing eligibility for compensation and assisting people return to work.

WorkSafe is continually working to improve the method of assessing a worker's eligibility for compensation to ensure those with a genuine claim receive entitlements and support quickly.

Helping workers with a claim related to workplace stress to recover and return to work is also a major focus of WorkSafe.

WorkSafe would like to thank the public sector employers and unions involved in the development of this publication.

# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>	<b>3. Stresswise OHS work-related stress prevention worksheet</b> .....	<b>12</b>
The benefits of preventing stress in the workplace ..	1	1. Social and physical work environment .....	13
<b>Overview: The OHS work-related stress prevention process</b> .....	<b>2</b>	2. Systems of work .....	15
Step 1 – Identifying potential work-related stress hazards .....	3	3. Management of work .....	17
Step 2 – Determining work-related stress risks .....	3	<b>4. Attachments</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Step 3 – Controlling work-related stress hazards and risks .....	3	1. How to examine and interrogate workplace data .....	18
Step 4 – Implementing continuous improvement, trial, review and evaluate .....	3	2. Sample survey questions for work-related stress .....	20
<b>1. Work-related stress and OHS law</b> .....	<b>4</b>	3. Precursors to harmful outcomes from work-related stress .....	21
What OHS law requires .....	4	4. Action planning .....	22
Defining work-related stress .....	5	5. Case study: regional centre workgroup .....	23
Work-related stress and its effects .....	5	Step 1 – Identifying potential work-related stress hazards .....	23
Common sources of work-related stress .....	5	Step 2 – Determining work-related stress risks ..	23
<b>2. OHS work-related stress risk prevention</b> .....	<b>6</b>	Step 3 – Controlling work-related stress hazards and risks – local and organisational measures .....	23
Integrating work-related stress risk prevention into business as usual .....	6	Step 4 – Implementing continuous improvement, trial, review and evaluate .....	23
Using an OHS work-related stress risk prevention approach .....	8	Sample worksheet .....	24
Consultation .....	9	<b>5. Resources and links</b> .....	<b>29</b>
Step 1 – Identifying potential work-related stress hazards .....	9	WorkSafe resources .....	29
Step 2 – Determining work-related stress risks .....	10	Other resources .....	29
Step 3 – Controlling work-related stress hazards and risks, local and organisational risk control measures .....	10	Useful websites .....	30
Step 4 – Implementing continuous improvement, trial, review and evaluate .....	11	<b>6. Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>31</b>

# INTRODUCTION

This guide provides practical advice to employers on how to prevent risks to health from work-related stress. While a variety of approaches may be used, the occupational health and safety (OHS) risk prevention approach in this guide enables employers to meet their duty to consult about health and safety and to effectively prevent many stress-related illnesses and injuries in the workplace as demonstrated by local and international research.

The effects of work-related stress are becoming an increasing issue for workplace parties and the community. This is particularly so in the public sector where research indicates staff are experiencing increased stress related to their work.

There is often confusion between challenge and stress in the workplace. While challenge at work can have positive effects on people, work-related stress is an OHS hazard that can pose risks to psychological and physical health.

## THE BENEFITS OF PREVENTING STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Preventing risks arising from work-related stress can provide numerous benefits to organisations, employees and the community through:

- reduced symptoms of poor mental and physical health;
- fewer injuries, less illness and lost time;
- reduced sick leave usage, absences and staff turnover, and increased productivity;
- greater job satisfaction;
- improved staff morale;
- increased work engagement;
- reduced costs to the employer;
- better services to the community; and
- improved employee health and community wellbeing.

A systems approach involving a combination of organisational and individual interventions is recommended for the prevention and management of work-related stress. This includes programs for:

- proactively preventing psychological illness or injury, through OHS work-related stress risk prevention (primary intervention);
- recognising and supporting staff who are experiencing work-related stress, such as counselling services (secondary intervention); and
- ensuring injured workers receive the treatment and assistance they require to return to safe and healthy work following psychological injury (tertiary intervention).

# OVERVIEW: THE OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION PROCESS

This overview shows the Steps to the stress prevention process at a glance. Once a manager, HSR and workgroup are familiar with the stress prevention process as described in detail in Part 2 of the guide, the Overview can be used as a prompt to move progressively through each of the four steps.

## STEP 1 – IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL WORK-RELATED STRESS HAZARDS

Workgroup consultation should be used to identify any factors (hazards) that have the potential to cause stress in a workplace. Identifying stress hazards may be assisted by workgroups:

- examining relevant work-related information and data that has people's identities removed;
- examining summary information from workplace surveys; and/or
- using workgroup exercises, such as visual mapping.

**Complete Step 1 of the OHS work-related stress prevention worksheet to identify and record potential work-related stress hazards.**

## STEP 2 – DETERMINING WORK-RELATED STRESS RISKS

Workgroup consultation should be used to determine any stress risks in a workplace that are affecting people. The workgroup may meet to discuss and record:

- the circumstances in which work-related stress hazards and risks occur;
- the frequency and duration of exposure to work-related stress hazards and risks; and
- the harmful precursors and/or outcomes experienced by the workgroup.

**Complete Step 2 of the OHS work-related stress prevention worksheet to determine and record any work-related stress risks in the workplace.**

## STEP 3 – CONTROLLING WORK-RELATED STRESS HAZARDS AND RISKS

Workgroup consultation should be used to determine the most suitable measures/actions to eliminate or reduce work-related stress hazards and risks, and how they are best applied in a workplace. Risk control may be achieved by actions to:

- improve the social and physical work environment;
- improve the systems of work; and
- improve the management of work.

Information, instruction, training or supervision may be used to support actions to reduce work-related stress hazards and risk.

**Implementing actions:** It is the local supervisor/manager's responsibility to ensure actions to control work-related stress hazards and risks which are within their authority and control are implemented.

Employees are also responsible for taking reasonable care for their own health and safety and that their acts or omissions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others in the workplace.

**Complete Step 3 of the OHS work-related stress prevention worksheet and record the measures/action to control work-related stress hazards and risks.**

## STEP 4 – IMPLEMENTING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT, TRIAL, REVIEW AND EVALUATE

The OHS work-related stress prevention process works best when it is regularly repeated (at least annually) or as needed (as work requirements or personnel change). Actions should be monitored and reviewed as part of a continuous improvement cycle to ensure that any new or potential work-related stress hazards and risks are eliminated or reduced. This can be achieved through consultation and staff evaluations or surveys about the effectiveness of stress prevention in the workplace.

# 1

## WORK-RELATED STRESS AND OHS LAW

### WHAT DOES 'EMPLOYEE' MEAN?

A reference to an employee includes a reference to an independent contractor engaged by an employer and any employees of the independent contractor. Employers have responsibility for contractors in relation to matters over which the employer has control.

### WHAT DOES 'OMISSIONS' MEAN?

Omissions are actions not taken that could reasonably be expected that a person would take in their work.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available in:

- *Summary of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*. 2nd Edition, June 2006;
- *Employee Representation*. A comprehensive guide to Part 7 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. 1st Edition, September 2006; and
- *Talking safety together. Guidance on workplace consultation, representation and resolving workplace health and safety issues*. 2nd Edition, September 2006.

This section of the guide outlines what employers can do to meet OHS requirements to achieve healthy and safe workplaces. It also defines work-related stress, its sources and effects.

### WHAT OHS LAW REQUIRES

Under OHS legislation, employers must provide and maintain for employees a work environment that is safe and without risks to the health. Employers must identify hazards and eliminate risks to health so far as is reasonably practicable and if not, reduce them as far as is reasonably practicable. This should be done in consultation so far as is reasonably practicable with employees who are, or are likely to be directly affected and their Health and Safety Representative (HSR), or by using agreed procedures for consultation in a workplace. A Health and Safety Committee (HSC) may also determine and support the procedures for the prevention of stress in the workplace.

OHS law requires employees at all levels to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that their acts or omissions at a workplace do not adversely affect the health and safety of themselves or others.

### What does 'reasonably practicable' mean?

The word practicable means feasible, physically possible or able to be done or accomplished. Actions to comply with a general duty for safety in the workplace must be feasible. This means that an employer is not expected to do everything that is humanly possible to do. They need to do what a reasonable and prudent person would do in the same position. In short, if something can be done, it is practicable. When determining what is reasonably practicable, an employer must have regard to the following:

- the likelihood of work-related stress hazards and risks eventuating;
- what is known or ought reasonably be known about work-related stress hazards and risks and ways of eliminating or reducing them;
- the availability and suitability of ways to eliminate or reduce work-related stress hazards and risks; and
- the cost of eliminating or reducing work-related stress hazards and risks.

### What does 'reasonable care' mean?

Reasonable care means taking responsibility for actions to eliminate or reduce the hazards and risks to health that a reasonable person knows, or reasonably ought to know.



## WHAT IS POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER?

Post-traumatic stress disorder may affect anyone who has been victim of or witness to a traumatic event such as a violent assault, an armed robbery or a hostage taking. Because everyone reacts differently to such events, some people will have no after-effects while others may experience a variety of symptoms such as flashbacks, difficulty concentrating and insomnia.<sup>(1)</sup>

## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a normal reaction to some of life's events which when profound may become a disorder. People with clinical depression may be persistently sad, have no interest in anything and take no pleasure in performing usual activities. The individual may also have reduced energy levels, sleep and eating disorders, difficulties concentrating, feelings of guilt and discouragement, and in some cases, suicidal thoughts.<sup>(2)</sup>

## WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is a normal emotional response to a threat or danger which when excessive, persistent or uncontrollable, may become a disorder. People with generalised anxiety disorders become excessively worried when confronted with events that are part of everyday life and may experience symptoms such as, irritability, dizzy spells, palpitations, chest pain, loss of memory and difficulty in concentrating.<sup>(3)</sup>

## DEFINING WORK-RELATED STRESS

The guide has adopted the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of work-related stress which is *'the reaction people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope.'*

The WHO advises that *'stress occurs in a wide range of work circumstances but is often made worse when employees feel they have little support from supervisors and colleagues and where they have little control over work or how they can cope with its demands and pressures.'*

## WORK-RELATED STRESS AND ITS EFFECTS

Work is generally considered to be beneficial to mental health in that it provides people with structure, purpose and a sense of identity. It also provides opportunities for people to: develop and use their skills; form social relationships; and increase their feelings of self-worth.

The guide aims to prevent the negative health effects of work-related stress. This is best achieved by recognising the precursors to injury and illness, and the negative health outcomes of work-related stress that impact on:

- mental health, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and/or anxiety (precursors to mental ill-health outcomes may include low job satisfaction and feelings of discouragement);
- physical health, such as musculoskeletal disorders, and increased risk of physical diseases or illness, e.g. cardiovascular disease (precursors to physical ill health outcomes may include muscular tension and increased blood pressure);
- work performance, which can contribute to increased risk of incidents and injuries (precursors to poor work performance may include difficulty concentrating and memory loss); and
- social relationships which can contribute to a breakdown of relationships both at work and home (precursors to poor social relationships may include increased irritability leading to social isolation and/or contributing to depression or anxiety).

## COMMON SOURCES OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

The potential sources of work-related stress arising largely from the work environment that includes the:

- workplace social environment, such as the organisational culture and function, interpersonal relationships, individuals' roles in the organisation, career development, status and pay, and competing home and work requirements;
- physical work environment and equipment used in the workplace;
- systems of work, such as content or/demands of work, workload or work pace, work schedule or working hours, participation in decision-making and control over work and the systems for communication in the workplace; and
- management of work, such as supervision, instruction, information and training.

1: Source: Université Laval. 2005. Mental Health at Work ... From Defining to Solving the Problem.

Produced by the Chair in Occupational Health and Safety Management, Université Laval, Québec, Canada.

2: *ibid.*

3: *ibid.*

# 2

## OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS RISK PREVENTION

This section of the guide describes how work-related stress prevention can be integrated into the OHS systems in a workplace. It outlines the steps and tools that a manager can use to lead and improve their effectiveness in identifying and dealing with work-related stress to meet OHS requirements.

### **INTEGRATING WORK-RELATED STRESS RISK PREVENTION INTO BUSINESS AS USUAL**

Effective work-related stress prevention is best achieved through the following key elements:

- commitment by senior management, e.g. a policy and/or letter of commitment from senior management to prevent work-related stress sends a powerful message to employees that their health and safety is a priority.
- communication to raise awareness and understanding of work-related stress prevention, build trust and participation, clarify expectations and desired outcomes, and provide feedback about progress over time.
- integration into workplace OHS representation, consultative and issue resolution processes and systems.
- systematically identifying 'at risk' workgroups across an organisation where work-related stress hazards and risks that are likely or do cause harm to employee health are evident. Apply the OHS work-related stress risk prevention approach with workgroup consultation to determine ways of eliminating or reducing the hazards and risks.

# OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS RISK PREVENTION

## WHAT IS A 'HAZARD'?

Hazard refers to a thing, an arrangement, a person's behaviour, an event or situation that has the potential to cause harm.

## WHAT IS A 'RISK'?

Risk is the likelihood of a hazard to cause harm given the circumstances in which the hazard arises.

## WHAT IS 'HARM'?

Harm refers to physical or psychological deterioration of health. The degree of harm means the consequences (nature and severity) of harm should a hazard or risk eventuate.

- arrangements to guide and support work-related stress prevention strategies where required and initiate them across an organisation, such as:
  - a steering group to plan and support the involvement of employees (including managers/supervisors), secure resources and ensure that actions to control identified work-related stress hazards and risks are implemented and supported at all levels in the organisation; or
  - local representative committee to ensure actions to control identified work-related stress hazards and risks are implemented at the local level, compile reports of agreed actions from workgroups and determine the means of implementing actions to control risks that are beyond a local workgroup's authority.
- resource allocation and support to:
  - regularly gather and examine information from sources such as workplace surveys to determine actions to address key work-related stress hazards and risks across the organisation;
  - routinely examine workplace data to help determine workgroups where work-related stress has the potential to cause harm (such as high levels of sick leave) or where harm has occurred and risk is confirmed, such as a stress-related claim for injury or illness;
  - provide managers/supervisors with the knowledge and skills in using the OHS work-related stress risk prevention workgroup consultative approach described in this guide (or other equally effective approach) to identify and control stress-related hazards and risks in their workplaces and meet compliance with OHS law;
  - ensure support of workgroups in the provision of trained facilitators e.g. human resource departments or external to the workgroup;
  - support 'at risk' workgroups to determine actions to address the underlying sources of work-related stress risk in their area;
  - facilitate 'at risk' workgroups where interpersonal conflict or bullying is identified as a source of work-related stress risk; and
  - implement work-related stress prevention strategies and monitor them via existing OHS systems within the organisation.

# OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS RISK PREVENTION

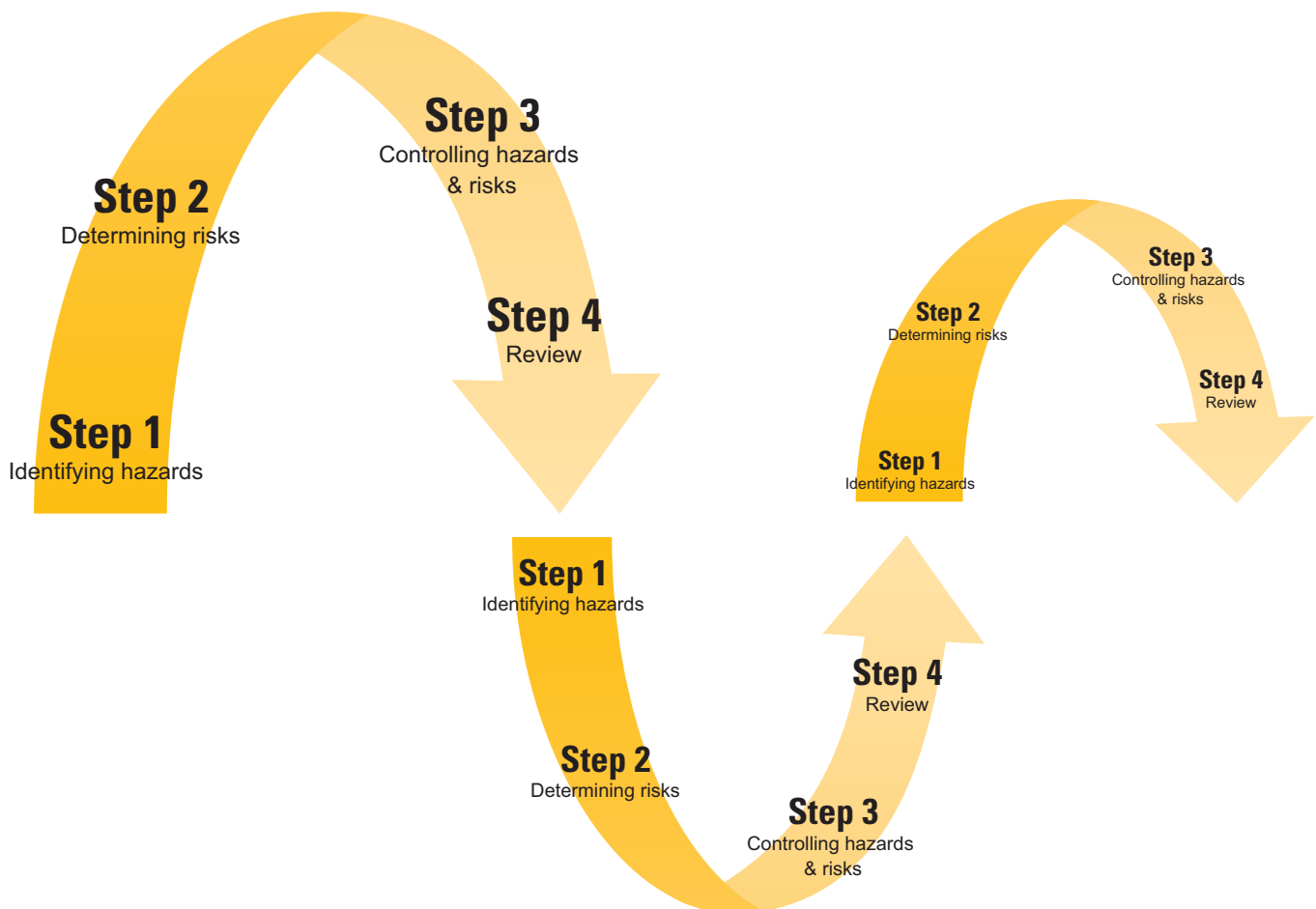
## USING AN OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS RISK PREVENTION APPROACH

OHS work-related stress risk prevention is a process that requires continuous improvement. It involves systematically:

- identifying work-related stress hazards and the potential for risks to health in the workplace;
- determining risks by describing the circumstances and exposure to risk and the effects on workgroups;
- controlling risk by putting in place measures to eliminate or reduce the hazards and risks so far as is reasonably practicable; and
- reviewing and improving the effectiveness of risk control measures over time.

### OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS RISK PREVENTION

Continuous Improvement Process and Progressive Risk Reduction/Elimination



Note: This is a Continuous Improvement Process

# OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS RISK PREVENTION

## WORKGROUP CONSULTATION

Workgroup consultation, involving employees who are, or may be, directly affected by work-related stress, the HSR, and the supervisor/manager, should be used to identify any hazards or risks and, where these exist, determine actions to eliminate or reduce the hazards or risks to health from stress in a workplace.

## WHAT DOES 'WORKGROUP' MEAN?

A workgroup is a designated work group (DWG) as provided for in OHS legislation. Where a DWG has not been formed, a workgroup may comprise a work team or representatives of a larger group of employees who are or are likely to be directly affected by work-related stress.

## CONSULTATION

Consultation refers to employers and employees exchanging information and ideas about hazards and risks to health and safety, and measures that can be taken to eliminate or reduce the hazards and risks. The OHS Act 2004 requires employers to consult by:

- sharing information with employees about work-related stress hazards and risks. For example this means making information available in a timely way and in a form that is understood by employees;
- giving employees a reasonable opportunity to express their views about these issues. For example this means encouraging employees to ask questions, raise health and safety concerns, make safety recommendations and be part of the problem-solving process; and
- taking their views into account. For example this means enabling employees to shape decisions about OHS, not hear about decisions after they have been made.

For more guidance on consultation refer to WorkSafe's publication *Talking Safety Together*. How getting everyone involved can make workplace healthier and safer. 2nd Edition, March 2006.

## STEP 1 – IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL WORK-RELATED STRESS HAZARDS

Workgroup consultation should be used to identify any factors (known as stress hazards) that have the potential to cause stress in a workplace.

A variety of other activities may also be used to help workgroups identify any potential work-related stress hazards. For example, in organisations where workplace information and data is available, workgroups may be assisted by:

- examining de-identified information and summary workplace data, such as sick leave usage, absenteeism and staff turnover, claims for compensation, incident reports, and exit interview reports, to look for trends, changes and patterns in incident causes. Employers need to provide summary information to workgroups to help them identify potential work-related stress hazards in their work area.

**See Attachment 1 for information about how to examine and interrogate workplace information and data.**

- examining summary information from workplace surveys. Results of workplace surveys which collect information about work-related stress hazards and outcomes will also help workgroups, where hazards have been identified, to focus on the key factors that have the potential to cause harm in their workplace.

**See Attachment 2 for sample survey questions.**

- visual mapping exercises, which help workgroups identify the location of work-related stress hazards in the design of work, the social/physical work environment, the broader organisation and the community.

While these and other sources of information may help identify hotspots and alert an employer to potential work-related stress hazards and risks, workgroup consultation is essential to determine how these hazards or risks occur in the workplace.

### Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of personal information

Personal information is information or opinion, whether true or not about an identifiable individual. It should NOT be possible to identify an individual from workplace records, survey data or consultations. Ways to achieve this may include:

- using summary or aggregate data or information from workplace records or surveys;
- using de-identified information where personal identifiers, such as name, date of birth and staff ID number have been removed or blocked out so it is not possible to identify an individual; and
- recording information about harm, from workgroup consultations, without identifying individuals.

**Complete Step 1 of the OHS work-related stress prevention worksheet on page 15 to identify and record potential work-related stress hazards.**

# OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS RISK PREVENTION

## STEP 2 – DETERMINING WORK-RELATED STRESS RISKS

Where Step 1 identifies the presence of any stress hazards in the workplace, workgroup consultation should be used to determine whether these hazards do or are likely to create risks to health in a workplace.

The workgroup should meet to discuss and record:

- the circumstances when work-related stress hazards and risks occur;
- the frequency and duration of exposure to work-related stress hazards and risks, to determine whether risk builds up over time or occurs in a single incident; and
- any physical, psychological and/or behavioural precursors to harm, injury, illness or negative health outcomes experienced by the workgroup.

**See Attachment 3 for precursors that indicate the potential for harm from work-related stress.**

**Complete Step 2 of the OHS work-related stress prevention worksheet on page 15 to determine and record any work-related stress risks in the workplace.**

## STEP 3 – CONTROLLING WORK-RELATED STRESS HAZARDS AND RISKS, LOCAL AND ORGANISATIONAL RISK CONTROL MEASURES

Workgroup consultation should be used to determine the most suitable actions or measures to address identified work-related stress hazards and risks and how they are best applied in a workplace.

Risk control may be achieved by:

- **improving the workplace social environment through measures/actions such as:**
  - improving communication in the work environment
  - providing support for staff to do their work
  - improving interpersonal relationships through actions such as implementing an issues resolution process for clients
  - addressing lack of role clarity, or role conflict issues by ensuring that job roles are clearly defined so that staff are clear about what is expected
  - addressing job security and career issues such as providing career options and/or development opportunities for staff
  - providing support for staff with conflicting home/work requirements, such as some flexibility in working arrangements
  - providing clear organisational objectives and building a leadership culture that engages, supports and motivates staff;
- **improving the physical work environment through measures/actions such as:**
  - ensuring staff have a suitably designed work environment
  - providing the equipment, facilities and technology they need to do their work;
- **improving systems of work through measures/actions such as:**
  - improving the content of work by actions, e.g. providing work that is varied, meaningful and utilises staff skills
  - ensuring staff workloads are reasonable by actions such as ensuring adequate resources to meet work requirements including at times of high workload
  - providing working arrangements such as work schedules that enable staff to obtain sufficient rest
  - involving staff in decisions about their work and providing opportunities for staff to have input and some control in relation to their work
  - improving organisational systems such as ensuring staff are able to communicate with their team;
- **improving the management of work through such measures/actions as:**
  - building leadership and management skills to prevent work-related stress
  - supervision to enable people to work safely and without risks to health
  - providing information, instruction and training regarding the systems of work and the organisation's policies and procedures designed to protect and support employee health and safety.

# OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS RISK PREVENTION

## STEP 3 – CONTINUED

Note: Information, instruction and training may be used to support other actions, or as an interim measure to reduce risks to health until other actions that address the risks can be implemented. This is considered an administrative control measure which should not be used on its own to reduce risk.

Supervisors/managers need to work with their workgroup to determine actions to eliminate or reduce work-related stress hazards and risks and determine how and when actions can be trialled and evaluated. It is a supervisor or manager's responsibility to implement the actions that are within his/her authority or control, so far as is reasonably practicable. It is also the manager's responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of actions to eliminate or reduce work-related stress hazards and risks over time.

Some organisational actions may need to be authorised and/or actioned at a more senior decision-making level, such as actions that require an organisation-wide response. An action plan should clearly outline: what's required at both a local and organisational level; who is responsible; and the appropriate support, resources, timelines and infrastructure for all parties to implement actions.

**See Attachment 4 for sample action plans.**

A Health and Safety Committee (HSC) may also support the activities to control work-related stress hazards and risks, and monitor and review the implementation of actions to ensure that the intervention meets the needs of local workgroups.

**Complete Step 3 of the OHS work-related stress prevention worksheet on page 15 and record the action to control work-related stress hazards and risks.**

## STEP 4 – IMPLEMENTING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT, TRIAL, REVIEW AND EVALUATE

Trialling, monitoring and reviewing the actions implemented to control identified work-related stress hazards and risks will ensure their continued relevance and effectiveness over time, and enable workgroups to identify and control any new hazards or risks as they occur. This is the responsibility of a supervisor/manager and may be achieved through consultation, staff evaluations or surveys that gather information about the effectiveness of stress prevention in the workplace. A HSC may also support these activities.

The OHS stress risk prevention process works best when it is regularly repeated (at least annually) or as needed (as changes to work occur). Actions should be monitored and reviewed as part of a continuous improvement cycle to: ensure that any new or potential work-related stress hazards and risks are eliminated or reduced; and take into account new information about hazards and risks and ways of addressing them.

**See Attachment 5 for a case study.**

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available in *Summary of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*. 2nd Edition, June 2006.

### The need to comply with OHS law

While the support for people with work-related stress is well known, addressing work-related stress is a complex issue that requires preventative action, response to workplace issues, and assistance to people who are ill or injured. This guide is an important first step to providing employers with some direct advice on how to prevent stress in the workplace that harms people and how to comply with OHS law.

OHS law requires employers to strive for the highest level of protection for the health and safety of people in the workplace – every worker has the right to come home safely and in good health.

As with the prevention of other OHS hazards, this guide provides the opportunity for public sector employers to improve the provision of their services to the community, through workplace consultation and actions to improve the design, organisation and management of work.

It is positive preventive action that improves the health, safety and productivity of people at work.

# 3

## **STRESSWISE OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION WORKSHEET**

The Stresswise OHS Work-related Stress Prevention Worksheet enables workgroups to systematically record information about any work-related stress hazards and risks identified in the workplace, and how these hazards and risks will be controlled.



# STRESSWISE OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION WORKSHEET

Date:	Workgroup:	Management Representative: Health and Safety Representative:
-------	------------	---

## 1. SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

STEP 1 Identify potential work-related stress factors or hazards.	STEP 2 Determine work-related stress risks.	STEP 3 Control work-related stress hazards and risks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tick the potential stress factors or hazards in the workplace from workgroup discussion and/or information from workplace records.</li> </ul> <p><b>If you have a tick in STEP 1, proceed to STEP 2.</b></p>	<p>Record what the workgroup says about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the circumstances when the hazard or risk occurs;</li> <li>the frequency and duration of exposure; and</li> <li>things the workgroup says are likely to cause harm (the precursors to harm) or the harmful outcomes (illness or injuries) experienced by the workgroup* (see Attachment 3).</li> </ol> <p><b>Proceed to STEP 3.</b></p>	<p>List:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>actions the workgroup determines are needed to control work-related stress hazards and risks;</li> <li>who is responsible;</li> <li>the date by which actions are to be trialled, evaluated and implemented; and</li> <li>the date by which actions are to be reviewed.</li> </ul> <p><b>A manager/supervisor must then proceed to implement local actions so far as is reasonably practicable and where required, and recommend actions for decisions or authorisation at a higher level in the organisation.</b></p>
<p><b>Organisational culture and function</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor communication</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor leadership</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> low levels of support for problem-solving and personal development</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of definition of or agreement on organisational objectives and structure</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor management of organisational change</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Interpersonal relationships at work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> social or physical isolation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor relationship with co-workers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor relationships with superiors/workers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> interpersonal conflict</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of social support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> bullying, harassment and violence</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> isolated or solitary work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of agreed procedures or knowledge of procedures for dealing with workplace problems or complaints</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>		

# STRESSWISE OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION WORKSHEET

## 1. SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL WORK ENVIRONMENT (CONTINUED)

STEP 1 Identify potential work-related stress factors or hazards.	STEP 2 Determine work-related stress risks.	STEP 3 Control work-related stress hazards and risks.
<b>Role in the organisation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> unclear work role</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> conflicting roles within the same job</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> responsibility for people</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> continuously dealing with other people and their problems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>		
<b>Career development, status and pay</b> <p>Unclear processes that lead to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> career uncertainty</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> under/over-promotion</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of promotion prospects</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> job insecurity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> pay inequity or pay not commensurate with work requirements</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> low social value of work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> unclear or unfair processes for performance appraisal</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> being over-skilled or under-skilled for the job</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>		
<b>Home/work demands</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> conflicting demands of work and home</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> low support for domestic problems at work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> low support for work problems at home</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>		
<b>Physical work environment and equipment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor workplace layout</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of space</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> layout or location that interferes with communication</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> layout or location that interferes with social support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> inadequate equipment availability, suitability or maintenance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor lighting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> excessive noise</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>		

# STRESSWISE OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION WORKSHEET

## 2. SYSTEMS OF WORK

STEP 1 Identify potential work-related stress factors or hazards.	STEP 2 Determine work-related stress risks.	STEP 3 Control work-related stress hazards and risks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tick the potential stress factors or hazards in the workplace from workplace discussion and/or information from workplace records.</li> </ul> <p><b>If you have a tick in STEP 1, proceed to STEP 2.</b></p>	<p>Record what the workplace says about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the circumstances when the hazard or risk occurs;</li> <li>2. the frequency and duration of exposure; and</li> <li>3. things the workplace says are likely to cause harm (the precursors to harm) or the harmful outcomes (illness or injuries) experienced by the workplace* (see Attachment 3).</li> </ol> <p><b>Proceed to STEP 3.</b></p>	<p>List:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• actions the workplace determines are needed to control work-related stress hazards and risks;</li> <li>• who is responsible;</li> <li>• the date by which actions are to be trialled, evaluated and implemented; and</li> <li>• the date by which actions are to be reviewed.</li> </ul> <p><b>A manager/supervisor must then proceed to implement local actions so far as is reasonably practicable and where required, and recommend actions for decisions or authorisation at a higher level in the organisation.</b></p>
<p><b>Content /demands of the work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of variety</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> monotonous, under-stimulating, fragmented or meaningless work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> under use of skills</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> high uncertainty</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> low social value of work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> continuous exposure to people through work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> unpleasant tasks</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> tasks that require emotions to be kept hidden</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Workload/work pace</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> work overload or underload</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> machine pacing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> having too much or too little to do</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> working under time pressures</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> continually subject to deadlines</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>		

# STRESSWISE OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION WORKSHEET

## 2. SYSTEMS OF WORK (CONTINUED)

STEP 1 Identify potential work-related stress factors or hazards.	STEP 2 Determine work-related stress risks.	STEP 3 Control work-related stress hazards and risks.
<p><b>Work schedule/working hours</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> shift working</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> night shifts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poorly designed shift systems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> strict and inflexible work schedules</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> unpredictable working hours</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> long or unsocial hours</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Participation and control</b></p> <p>Issues to do with control over and involvement in decisions that could be reasonably be expected in a job or a role about such things as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> work methods</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> workload</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> work schedules</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> the pace of work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> the working environment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> shift work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>		

# STRESSWISE OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION WORKSHEET

## 3. MANAGEMENT OF WORK

STEP 1 Identify potential work-related stress factors or hazards.	STEP 2 Determine work-related stress risks.	STEP 3 Control work-related stress hazards and risks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tick the potential stress factors or hazards in the workplace from workgroup discussion and/or information from workplace records.</li> </ul> <p><b>If you have a tick in STEP 1, proceed to STEP 2.</b></p>	<p>Record what the workgroup says about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the circumstances when the hazard or risk occurs;</li> <li>2. the frequency and duration of exposure; and</li> <li>3. things the workgroup says are likely to cause harm (the precursors to harm) or the harmful outcomes (illness or injuries) experienced by the workgroup* (see Attachment 3).</li> </ol> <p><b>Proceed to STEP 3.</b></p>	<p>List:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• actions the workgroup determines are needed to control work-related stress hazards and risks;</li> <li>• who is responsible;</li> <li>• the date by which actions are to be trialled, evaluated and implemented; and</li> <li>• the date by which actions are to be reviewed.</li> </ul> <p><b>A manager/supervisor must then proceed to implement local actions so far as is reasonably practicable and where required, and recommend actions for decisions or authorisation at a higher level in the organisation.</b></p>
<p><b>Supervision</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> inadequate or absent supervision</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> inconsiderate or unsupportive supervision</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Information, instruction, training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> inadequate information, instruction or training to enable staff to do their work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> inadequate information, instruction or training to enable staff to identify and report work-related stress hazards</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> inadequate training in the organisation's policies and procedures designed to protect and support employee health and safety</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>		

Worksheet adapted from the World Health Organization (WHO) 2004. Work organisation and stress. Protecting Worker's Health Series No. 3.

\* Note: Privacy and confidentiality of personal information must be protected. Personal information is information or opinion, whether true or not about an identifiable individual. It should not be possible to identify an individual from workplace records, survey data or consultations, therefore, grouped or aggregate information is recommended to protect the identity of individuals.

### Feedback to workgroups

Where it is not appropriate for actions to be implemented or they need to be modified to reduce risk to other parties, this needs to be communicated to workgroups/HSRs. Consultation should occur to ensure that accurate information is provided and outcomes are clearly understood.

# 4

## ATTACHMENTS

1. How to examine and interrogate workplace data
2. Sample survey questions for work-related stress
3. Precursors to harmful outcomes from work-related stress
4. Action planning
5. Case study: Regional centre workgroup

### 1. HOW TO EXAMINE AND INTERROGATE WORKPLACE DATA

Workplace data may be examined or analysed to determine trends and indicators of a stress problem in the workplace. Determine if you have these sources of information in the workplace, and seek aggregate or summary information.

<b>Records of sick leave with or without certificates</b>	Look at the rate of sick leave for a workgroup compared to the average across a unit, region or department and compared to the whole organisation. Look for types of illness in summary information – tension headaches or migraine, recurrent general ill-health such as colds or flu, digestive system ulcers, musculoskeletal disorders such as tendon or muscular soreness, etc. Examine data frequencies and trends for each workplace/workgroup.
<b>Recreation leave</b>	Look at the pattern of use. Taking small amounts of time off is commonly associated with unpleasant working conditions and employee work-related stress.
<b>Absenteeism records</b>	Look at trends particularly related to the work-related stress factors or hazards listed in Step 1 of the Stresswise OHS work-related stress prevention worksheet.
<b>Workers' compensation claims</b>	Examine data re workers' compensation claims for work-related stress, post-traumatic disorder, anxiety and depression. Record the factors associated with work-related stress claims, and the actions undertaken in the workplace to prevent further injury/illness. Patterns and trends of workers' compensation claims can provide insights and information about stress hazards and risks in a workplace.
<b>Grievance information</b>	Workplace grievance information can also indicate issues that may give rise to stress in the workplace such as harassment, discrimination, occupational violence and bullying.
<b>Incident and injury records</b>	Look at dates and times that coincide with other events, trends, etc. The pattern of small and large incidents can provide insights into the sources of stress in a workplace.
<b>Employee assistance programs</b>	Summary data from, e.g. number of reports, types of issues managed, etc.

# ATTACHMENT 1 – HOW TO EXAMINE AND INTERROGATE WORKPLACE DATA

<b>Industrial relations records</b>	This can provide insights into the level of job dissatisfaction in the workplace. Industrial relations disputes are frequently associated with stress in the workplace.
<b>Minutes of meetings</b>	OHS meetings, tool box meetings, staff meetings – look for issues that remain unresolved and reappear over time such as workload, changes in work roles, etc.
<b>Issue resolution records</b>	Look for OHS issues with changes to work systems, practices, management, responsibilities, etc.
<b>Work schedules</b>	Examine records of work schedules and how they were designed, records of long hours of work, planned and unplanned, and overtime usage.
<b>Employee opinion survey information</b>	Look for employee satisfaction with such things as leadership, pay, the management of workplace conflict, reward and recognition of effort, career opportunities, job security, working conditions, workplace consultation, communication and involvement in decision-making, control over workload, work schedules, work culture issues such as levels of support, social or physical isolation, management style, etc.
<b>Questionnaire results re work-related stress</b>	Use specific questions to identify and/or measure the degree of psychological distress and physical symptoms and exposure to particular work-related stress factors experienced by individuals and work groups.
<b>Organisation's policies and procedures</b>	Knowledge of – and compliance with – the organisation's policies and procedures for workplace consultation and issue resolution, and the prevention of work-related: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• harassment or bullying;</li> <li>• occupational violence;</li> <li>• unfair treatment;</li> <li>• discrimination;</li> <li>• interpersonal conflict;</li> <li>• fatigue;</li> <li>• stress.</li> </ul>
<b>Physiological or biochemical testing records</b>	Some organisations participate in health-related research. Biochemical measures including tests for catecholamines and corticosteroids (stress hormones) may provide useful information about a workgroup's exposure to stress in the workplace.  Some organisations also monitor the health of employees who may be exposed to particular health and safety hazards such as lead. Look at summary health records data for a workgroup such as heart rate, blood pressure and muscle tension which may indicate work-related stress.

*Note: Privacy and confidentiality of personal information must be protected. Personal information is information or opinion, whether true or not about an identifiable individual. It should not be possible to identify an individual from workplace records, survey data or workplace consultation, therefore grouped or aggregate information is recommended to protect the identity of individuals.*

*Only persons authorised to handle personal information should summarise, aggregate or de-identify personal information.*

# ATTACHMENT 2 – SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR WORK-RELATED STRESS

---

## 2. SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR WORK-RELATED STRESS

The following questions cover the areas that have been found to be the main sources of stress for people at work. Please tick the box that most accurately reflects how you feel about your job at the moment.

**Please only tick ONE box for each question.**

1. I have unrealistic time pressures

☐ Often      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Seldom      ☐ Never/almost never

2. Staff are consulted about change at work

☐ Often      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Seldom      ☐ Never/almost never

3. I have some say over the way I work

☐ Often      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Seldom      ☐ Never/almost never

4. I am clear about what my duties and responsibilities are

☐ Often      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Seldom      ☐ Never/almost never

5. I receive the respect I deserve from my colleagues at work

☐ Often      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Seldom      ☐ Never/almost never

6. Staff are exposed to interpersonal conflict at work

☐ Often      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Seldom      ☐ Never/almost never

7. My line manager encourages me at work

☐ Often      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Seldom      ☐ Never/almost never

*Source: Cousins R, Mackay C, Clarke S, Kelly C, Kelly P and McCaig R, 'Management Standards and work-related stress in the UK: Practical development', Work and Stress: a journal of work, health and organisation, 18(2), 2004, p.130; and [www.hse.gov.uk/stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress)*

*Note: Privacy and confidentiality of personal information must be protected. Personal information is information or opinion, whether true or not about an identifiable individual. It should not be possible to identify an individual from workplace records, survey data or workplace consultation, therefore grouped or aggregate information is recommended to protect the identity of individuals.*

*Only persons authorised to handle personal information should summarise, aggregate or de-identify personal information.*



# ATTACHMENT 3 – PRECURSORS TO HARMFUL OUTCOMES FROM WORK-RELATED STRESS

## 3. PRECURSORS TO HARMFUL OUTCOMES FROM WORK-RELATED STRESS

The following is a list of signs, symptoms, behaviours or outcomes that have been found to be associated with increased risk or likelihood of harm, injury or illness from work-related stress. Use the precursors in workgroup consultations to identify likely harmful outcomes from work-related stress.

PHYSICAL HEALTH PRECURSORS	PSYCHOLOGICAL PRECURSORS	BEHAVIOURAL PRECURSORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• migraines</li> <li>• sleep disorders</li> <li>• muscular tension</li> <li>• weight disorders</li> <li>• gastrointestinal disorders</li> <li>• increased blood pressure</li> <li>• allergies</li> <li>• increased cholesterol rate</li> <li>• dermatological disorders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• depression</li> <li>• discouragement</li> <li>• boredom</li> <li>• anxiety</li> <li>• memory loss</li> <li>• difficulty concentrating</li> <li>• dissatisfaction</li> <li>• frustration</li> <li>• irritability</li> <li>• pessimism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• absenteeism</li> <li>• drug/alcohol use</li> <li>• excessive use of medicines</li> <li>• sexual disorders</li> <li>• impatience</li> <li>• irritability</li> <li>• aggressiveness</li> <li>• eating disorders</li> <li>• diminished creativity and initiative</li> <li>• problems with interpersonal relationships</li> <li>• frequent mood swings</li> <li>• superficial relationships</li> <li>• lower tolerance of frustration</li> <li>• disinterest</li> <li>• isolation</li> </ul>

POSSIBLE HARMFUL OUTCOMES		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• musculoskeletal disorders</li> <li>• cardiovascular disease</li> <li>• diabetes</li> <li>• autoimmune diseases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• post-traumatic stress disorder</li> <li>• suicide</li> <li>• clinical depression</li> <li>• clinical anxiety</li> <li>• bipolar disorder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drug/alcohol dependency</li> <li>• excessive use of medicine</li> <li>• breakdown of relationships</li> </ul>

*Adapted from: Université Laval. 2005. Mental Health at Work ... From Defining to Solving the Problem. (p7).: Produced by the Chair in Occupational Health and Safety Management, Université Laval, Québec, Canada. ISBN 2-9807808-3-9. info.cgsst@fsa.ulaval.ca*

*Note: Privacy and confidentiality of personal information must be protected. Personal information is information or opinion, whether true or not about an identifiable individual. It should not be possible to identify an individual from workplace records, survey data or workplace consultation, therefore grouped or aggregate information is recommended to protect the identity of individuals.*

*Only persons authorised to handle personal information should summarise, aggregate or de-identify personal information.*

## ATTACHMENT 4 – ACTION PLANNING

### 4. ACTION PLANNING

Some issues may need to be authorised and actioned at a higher decision level, such as actions that require an organisation-wide response. An action plan should clearly outline what is required at both a local level and what is recommended at an organisational level. An action plan should outline:

- actions to be taken;
- person responsible at the local, middle and senior management level in the organisation;
- timeframes for each action to be implemented;
- actions that need to be trialled and evaluated to determine their effectiveness prior to final implementation;
- appropriate support, resources, timelines and infrastructure required for all parties to implement actions;
- dates for reporting progress on the implementation of actions back to the workgroup;
- dates for the review of actions implemented; and
- date for the process to be repeated.

SAMPLE WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION ACTION PLAN					
Workgroup: Date:		Management Representative: Health and Safety Representative:			
	Work-related stress hazard/risk	Agreed risk control measures/actions	Priority Low/ medium/high	Responsibility Local/region/ organisation	Schedule Action and review
1					
2					
3					

### FEEDBACK TO WORKGROUPS

Where it is not appropriate for actions to be implemented or they need to be modified to reduce risk to other parties, this needs to be communicated to workgroups. Consultation should occur to ensure that accurate information is provided and outcomes are clearly understood.

# ATTACHMENT 5 – CASE STUDY: REGIONAL CENTRE WORKGROUP

## 5. CASE STUDY: REGIONAL CENTRE WORKGROUP

### STEP 1 – IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL WORK-RELATED STRESS HAZARDS

Communication was a cause for concern to the Health and Safety Representative (HSR) and a significant proportion of the 40 staff working at a regional centre. Staff felt that there was not sufficient information being passed on from management. Staff felt they were 'kept in the dark' and not adequately consulted about a range of workplace issues which affected the centre as a whole. This was ultimately seen to impact on staff on a personal level, causing considerable angst and stress in the workplace. The communication problem was exacerbated by the fact that staff work shifts, with not all staff being at the centre at the one time, impacting on the dissemination and consistency of communications in the centre.

**The workgroup recorded the potential stress factors or hazards in the workplace in Step 1 of the OHS work-related stress prevention worksheet.**

### STEP 2 – DETERMINING WORK-RELATED STRESS RISKS

Staff were invited to participate in OHS work-related stress prevention workshops at times of the day which allowed them all an opportunity to attend. The HSR and staff:

- described the circumstances when work-related stress occurred – 'the communication problem was common', 'lack of consultation and participation in decisions at the centre';
- described the frequency and duration of this issue occurring – 'communication has been poor on an ongoing basis, for a long time'; and
- determined the work-related stress risks – 'lack of agreed procedures for the dissemination of information to staff, and consultation about workplace issues'.

**The workgroup recorded the work-related stress risks in Step 2 of the OHS work-related stress prevention worksheet.**

### STEP 3 – CONTROLLING WORK-RELATED STRESS HAZARDS AND RISKS, LOCAL AND ORGANISATIONAL RISK CONTROL MEASURES

Staff determined a number of actions to reduce work-related stress from the 'communications problems'. These include (but were not limited to):

- changes to meeting times and dates to accommodate the different shifts, thereby increasing the opportunity for staff to attend;
- more regular 'all of staff' meetings to disseminate information, gain feedback from staff and involve them in decisions that affected their work;
- more visibility from senior management in attending and addressing staff at various forums and meetings at the centre;
- information posted on staff notice boards and staff 'pigeon holes' in hard copy format;
- the formation of a dedicated local consultative committee, to meet on a weekly or fortnightly basis, to deal with workplace issues; and
- the circulation of minutes of consultative committee meetings through a shared computer drive (which is accessible to all staff).

The solutions were incorporated into an action plan for implementation. A local consultative committee was convened to implement the action plan and follow through with the proposed solutions. Staff voted representatives onto a committee from each of their work areas to progress the action plan. The union was also represented at this committee.


**The workgroup recorded the measures/actions to control work-related stress hazards and risks in Step 3 of the OHS work-related stress prevention worksheet.**

### STEP 4 – IMPLEMENTING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT, TRIAL, REVIEW AND EVALUATE

The OHS team conducted a follow-up evaluation at the centre and was satisfied that these measures were going a long way to addressing the communications issues.

Another follow-up by the OHS team will be conducted in six months' time to further ascertain the success of these measures.

# ATTACHMENT 5 – CASE STUDY: REGIONAL CENTRE WORKGROUP – SAMPLE WORKSHEET

 <b>STRESSWISE OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION WORKSHEET</b>			
<b>Date:</b> 12/12/2006		<b>Workgroup:</b> Centre workgroup	
<b>Management Representative:</b> Jim Malloy, Centre manager <b>Health and Safety Representative:</b> Paul Smith, Group 1			
<b>1. SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL WORK ENVIRONMENT</b>			
<b>STEP 1 Identify potential work-related stress factors or hazards.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tick the potential stress factors or hazards in the workplace from workgroup discussion and/or information from workplace records.</li> </ul> <p><b>If you have a tick in STEP 1, proceed to STEP 2.</b></p>	<b>STEP 2 Determine work-related stress risks.</b> <p>Record what the workgroup says about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the circumstances when the hazard or risk occurs;</li> <li>the frequency and duration of exposure; and</li> <li>things the workgroup says are likely to cause harm (the precursors to harm) or the harmful outcomes (illness or injuries) experienced by the workgroup* (see Attachment 3).</li> </ol> <p><b>Proceed to STEP 3.</b></p>	<b>STEP 3 Control work-related stress hazards and risks.</b> <p>List:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>actions the workgroup determines are needed to control work-related stress hazards and risks;</li> <li>who is responsible;</li> <li>the date by which actions are to be trialled, evaluated and implemented; and</li> <li>the date by which actions are to be reviewed.</li> </ul> <p><b>A manager/supervisor must then proceed to implement local actions so far as is reasonably practicable and where required, and recommend actions for decisions or authorisation at a higher level in the organisation.</b></p>	<p><b>Organisational culture and function</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> poor communication</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor leadership</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> low levels of support for problem-solving and personal development</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of definition of or agreement on organisational objectives and structure</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor management of organisational change</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (describe): <b>Lack of agreed procedures or knowledge of procedures for dealing with workplace problems or complaints.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Interpersonal relationships at work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> social or physical isolation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor relationship with co-workers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor relationships with superiors/workers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> interpersonal conflict</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of social support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> bullying, harassment and violence</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> isolated or solitary work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of agreed procedures or knowledge of procedures for dealing with workplace problems or complaints</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe):</li> </ul>
	<p>Staff described the circumstances where there was not sufficient information being passed on from management, that they felt they were 'kept in the dark' about a range of workplace issues leading to isolation and disempowerment. They described communication as being 'poor on an ongoing basis, for a long time'. Staff described the harm or outcomes as anxiety angst, dissatisfaction, discouragement and work-related stress. They described the source of the risk as a 'lack of agreed procedures for the dissemination of information to staff, and consultation about workplace issues'.</p>	<p>More visibility from senior management in attending and addressing staff at various forums and meetings at the centre. Information posted on staff notice boards and staff 'pigeon holes' in hard copy format. Minutes of these consultative committee meetings are circulated through a shared computer drive (which is accessible to all staff). The development of agreed procedures for the dissemination of information to staff and consultation about workplace issues.</p>	<p>n/a</p>



## STRESSWISE OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION WORKSHEET

### 1. SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL WORK ENVIRONMENT (CONTINUED)

STEP 1 Identify potential work-related stress factors or hazards.	STEP 2 Determine work-related stress risks.	STEP 3 Control work-related stress hazards and risks.
<b>Role in the organisation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> unclear work role</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> conflicting roles within the same job</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> responsibility for people</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> continuously dealing with other people and their problems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>	n/a	n/a
<b>Career development, status and pay</b> <p>Unclear processes that lead to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> career uncertainty</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> under/over-promotion</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of promotion prospects</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> job insecurity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> pay inequity or pay not commensurate with work requirements</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> low social value of work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> unclear or unfair processes for performance appraisal</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> being over-skilled or under-skilled for the job</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>	n/a	n/a
<b>Home/work demands</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> conflicting demands of work and home</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> low support for domestic problems at work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> low support for work problems at home</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>	n/a	n/a
<b>Physical work environment and equipment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor workplace layout</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of space</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> layout or location that interferes with communication</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> layout or location that interferes with social support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> inadequate equipment availability, suitability or maintenance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor lighting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> excessive noise</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>	n/a	n/a

# ATTACHMENT 5 – CASE STUDY: REGIONAL CENTRE WORKGROUP – SAMPLE WORKSHEET



## STRESSWISE OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION WORKSHEET

### 2. SYSTEMS OF WORK

STEP 1 Identify potential work-related stress factors or hazards.	STEP 2 Determine work-related stress risks.	STEP 3 Control work-related stress hazards and risks.
<p>Identify potential work-related stress factors or hazards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tick the potential stress factors or hazards in the workplace from workgroup discussion and/or information from workplace records.</li> </ul> <p><b>If you have a tick in STEP 1, proceed to STEP 2.</b></p>	<p>Record what the workgroup says about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the circumstances when the hazard or risk occurs;</li> <li>the frequency and duration of exposure; and</li> <li>things the workgroup says are likely to cause harm (the precursors to harm) or the harmful outcomes (illness or injuries) experienced by the workgroup* (see Attachment 3).</li> </ol> <p><b>Proceed to STEP 3.</b></p>	<p>List:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>actions the workgroup determines are needed to control work-related stress hazards and risks;</li> <li>who is responsible;</li> <li>the date by which actions are to be trialled, evaluated and implemented; and</li> <li>the date by which actions are to be reviewed.</li> </ul> <p><b>A manager/supervisor must then proceed to implement local actions so far as is reasonably practicable and where required, and recommend actions for decisions or authorisation at a higher level in the organisation.</b></p>
<p><b>Content/demands of the work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of variety</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> monotonous, under-stimulating, fragmented or meaningless work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> under use of skills</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> high uncertainty</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> low social value of work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> continuous exposure to people through work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> unpleasant tasks</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> tasks that require emotions to be kept hidden</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>	n/a	n/a
<p><b>Workload/work pace</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> work overload or under load</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> machine pacing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> having too much or too little to do</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> working under time pressures</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> continually subject to deadlines</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>	n/a	n/a



## STRESSWISE OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION WORKSHEET

### 2. SYSTEMS OF WORK (CONTINUED)

STEP 1 Identify potential work-related stress factors or hazards.	STEP 2 Determine work-related stress risks.	STEP 3 Control work-related stress hazards and risks.
<p><b>Work schedule/working hours</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> shift working</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> night shifts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poorly designed shift systems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> strict and inflexible work schedules</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> unpredictable working hours</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> long or unsocial hours</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (describe): <b>Staff described the communication problem as exacerbated by the fact that staff work shifts, with not all staff being at the centre at the one time, impacting on the dissemination and consistency of communications in the centre.</b></li> </ul>	<p>Staff reported that when working on night shift they were particularly disadvantaged, disempowered, frustrated and isolated.</p>	<p>Staff meetings were moved to various times and dates to accommodate the different shifts, thereby increasing the opportunity for staff to attend.</p>
<p><b>Participation and control</b></p> <p>Issues to do with control over and involvement in decisions that could be reasonably be expected in a job or a role about such things as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work methods</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> workload</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work schedules</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the pace of work</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the working environment</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> shift work</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (describe): <b>Lack of consultation and participation in decisions about a range of workplace issues at the centre.</b></li> </ul>	<p>Staff described the lack of consultation and involvement in decision-making as disempowering, dissatisfying and frustrating.</p>	<p>More regular 'all of staff' meetings were scheduled, to disseminate information, gain feedback from staff and involve staff in decisions that affected their work.</p>

# ATTACHMENT 5 – CASE STUDY: REGIONAL CENTRE WORKGROUP – SAMPLE WORKSHEET



## STRESSWISE OHS WORK-RELATED STRESS PREVENTION WORKSHEET

### 3. MANAGEMENT OF WORK

STEP 1 Identify potential work-related stress factors or hazards.	STEP 2 Determine work-related stress risks.	STEP 3 Control work-related stress hazards and risks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tick the potential stress factors or hazards in the workplace from workgroup discussion and/or information from workplace records.</li> </ul> <p><b>If you have a tick in STEP 1, proceed to STEP 2.</b></p>	<p>Record what the workgroup says about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the circumstances when the hazard or risk occurs;</li> <li>2. the frequency and duration of exposure; and</li> <li>3. things the workgroup says are likely to cause harm (the precursors to harm) or the harmful outcomes (illness or injuries) experienced by the workgroup* (see Attachment 3).</li> </ol> <p><b>Proceed to STEP 3.</b></p>	<p>List:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• actions the workgroup determines are needed to control work-related stress hazards and risks;</li> <li>• who is responsible;</li> <li>• the date by which actions are to be trialled, evaluated and implemented; and</li> <li>• the date by which actions are to be reviewed.</li> </ul> <p><b>A manager/supervisor must then proceed to implement local actions so far as is reasonably practicable and where required, and recommend actions for decisions or authorisation at a higher level in the organisation.</b></p>
<p><b>Supervision</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> inadequate or absent supervision</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> inconsiderate or unsupportive supervision</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>	n/a	n/a
<p><b>Information, instruction, training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> inadequate information, instruction or training to enable staff to do their work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> inadequate information, instruction or training to enable staff to identify and report work-related stress hazards</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> inadequate training in the organisation's policies and procedures designed to protect and support employee health and safety</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (describe):</li> </ul>	n/a	n/a

Worksheet adapted from the World Health Organization (WHO) 2004. Work organisation and stress. Protecting Worker's Health Series No. 3.

\* Note: Privacy and confidentiality of personal information must be protected. Personal information is information or opinion, whether true or not about an identifiable individual. It should not be possible to identify an individual from workplace records, survey data or consultations, therefore, grouped or aggregate information is recommended to protect the identity of individuals.

#### Feedback to workgroups

Where it is not appropriate for actions to be implemented or they need to be modified to reduce risk to other parties, this needs to be communicated to workgroups/HSRs. Consultation should occur to ensure that accurate information is provided and outcomes are clearly understood.



# 5

## RESOURCES AND LINKS

### WORKSAFE RESOURCES

*Employee Representation. A comprehensive guide to Part 7 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004.* 1st Edition, September 2006.

*Prevention of bullying and violence at work. Guidance note,* February 2003.

*Stressing the point.* 2006.

*Summary of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004.* 2nd Edition, June 2006.

*Talking safety together. Guidance on workplace consultation, representation and resolving workplace health and safety issues.* 2nd Edition.

*The 2004–2005 Stress Prevention Study in the Victorian Budget Sector.*

*What to do if a worker is injured. A guide for employers.* April 2006.

### OTHER RESOURCES

Cox, T., Griffiths, A, Barlowe, C, Randall, R., Thomson, L. & Rial-Gonzalez, E. 2000. *Organisational interventions for work stress: A risk prevention approach.* Sudbury: HSE Books. Report 286. [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

Comcare. June 2005. *An organisational approach to preventing psychological injury. A guide for Corporate, HR and OHS managers.* Australian Government.

VicHealth 2006. *Workplace stress in Victoria: Developing a systems approach.*

Victorian Health Foundation. 2006 *Workplace stress in Victoria: Developing a Systems Approach.* ISBN 0-9757335-3-2

World Health Organisation 2004. *Work organisation and stress.* Protecting Workers' Health Series No. 3.

Macdonald, W. 2004. 'Workload, stress and psychosocial factors as hazards for musculoskeletal disorders', *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety – Australia & New Zealand*, 20(1), 2004, pp. 37–47.

Visual mapping exercises:

CPSU Victorian Branch *Health and Safety Representatives Training course in psychosocial hazards.* [www.cpsuvic.org/](http://www.cpsuvic.org/)

Canadian Union of Public Employees. 2003. *Enough workplace stress: organising for change.* p. 21. [www.cupe.ca](http://www.cupe.ca)

# RESOURCES AND LINKS

---

## USEFUL WEBSITES

### ACTU

Australian Council of Trade Unions. *Stop stress at work – a union guide for workers*. [www.actu.asn.au](http://www.actu.asn.au)

### Publications from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) UK

Health and Safety Executive 2003. *Beacons of excellence in stress prevention*. Research Report 133. [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

Health and Safety Executive 2003. *Best practice in rehabilitating employees following absence due to work-related stress*. Research Report 138. [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

### National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) USA

NIOSH Publication No. 99–101: *STRESS ... At Work*. [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

### Publications from the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (OSHA)

European Agency – *stress and psychosocial risks*. <http://osha.europa.eu>

European Agency 2002. Issue 309 – *How to tackle psychosocial issues and reduce work-related stress*. <http://osha.europa.eu>

European Agency 2002. Issue 104 – *Prevention of psychosocial risks and stress at work in practice*. <http://osha.europa.eu>

### Engineering Employer's Federation (UK)

Engineering Employer's Federation. *Health and Safety – Stress*. [www.eef.org.uk](http://www.eef.org.uk)

# 6

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WorkSafe Victoria would like to acknowledge the advice and contributions provided by the following Victorian Government organisations and unions in drafting this publication.

## **VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS**

Department of Education  
Department of Human Services  
Department of Justice  
Department of Premier and Cabinet  
Department of Primary Industries  
Department of Sustainability and Environment  
Department of Treasury and Finance  
Victoria Police

## **UNIONS**

Australian Education Union Victorian Branch  
Australian Nurses Federation  
Community and Public Sector Union – SPSF Group Victorian Branch  
Health and Community Services Union  
Health Services Union of Australia  
The Police Association of Victoria  
Victorian Trades Hall Council

## WORKSAFE VICTORIA

### Advisory Service

222 Exhibition Street  
Melbourne 3000

GPO Box 4306  
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

Phone . . . . . 03 9641 1444  
Toll-free . . . . . 1800 136 089  
Email . . . . . [info@workcover.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@workcover.vic.gov.au)

### Head Office

222 Exhibition Street  
Melbourne 3000

Phone . . . . . 03 9641 1555  
Toll-free . . . . . 1800 136 089  
Publications . . . . . 03 9641 1444  
Website . . . . . [www.workcover.vic.gov.au](http://www.workcover.vic.gov.au)

### Local Offices

Ballarat . . . . . 03 5338 4444  
Bendigo . . . . . 03 5443 8866  
Dandenong . . . . . 03 8792 9000  
Geelong . . . . . 03 5226 1200  
Melbourne  
(628 Bourke Street) . . . . 03 9941 0558  
Mildura . . . . . 03 5021 4001  
Mulgrave . . . . . 03 9565 9444  
Preston . . . . . 03 9485 4555  
Shepparton . . . . . 03 5831 8260  
Traralgon . . . . . 03 5174 8900  
Wangaratta . . . . . 03 5721 8588  
Warrnambool . . . . . 03 5564 3200