

# **THE CORE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE FOR GENERALIST OHS PROFESSIONALS**

A project conducted by HaSPA  
(Health and Safety Professionals Alliance)



**Australian OHS Education  
Accreditation Board**

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The OHS Body of Knowledge for Generalist OHS Professionals has been developed under the auspices of the **Health and Safety Professionals Alliance**



The Technical Panel established by the Health and Safety Professionals Alliance (HaSPA) was responsible for developing the conceptual framework of the OHS Body of Knowledge and for selecting contributing authors and peer-reviewers. The Technical Panel comprised representatives from:



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**The Safety Institute of Australia** supported the development of the OHS Body of Knowledge and will be providing ongoing support for the dissemination of the OHS Body of Knowledge and for the maintenance and further development of the Body of Knowledge through the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board which is auspiced by the Safety Institute of Australia.



## **Dedication**

This OHS Body of Knowledge is dedicated to all those who die, are injured or whose health suffers as a result of their work activities, and to their families and others affected by these deaths, injuries and illnesses\*. It is dedicated also to those OHS professionals, OHS practitioners and others whose work and life passion is the improvement of safety and health conditions in the workplace and who believe that work should be a positive life influence rather than a source of harm.

\*The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that 640,700 people experienced a work-related injury or illness in 2009-10,<sup>1</sup> while for 2008-9 Safe Work Australia recorded 134, 835 compensation claims for serious work-related injuries or illnesses<sup>2</sup> and 223 compensated fatalities<sup>3</sup>. While no current cost estimates are available the 2005-6 estimated cost of work-related injury and illness as \$57.5 billion (or 5.9% of GDP) is indicative.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics). (June, 2011). 4102.0 ó Australian Social Trends: Work and Health. Canberra, ACT. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au>

<sup>2</sup> Safe Work Australia. (2011). Key Work and Health and Safety Statistics. (p.3). Retrieved from <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au>

<sup>3</sup> Safe Work Australia. (2011). Key Work and Health and Safety Statistics. (p.10). Retrieved from <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au>

<sup>4</sup> Safe Work Australia. (2011). Key Work and Health and Safety Statistics. (p.3). Retrieved from <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au>

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## **STATEMENT FROM WORKSAFE VICTORIA**

WorkSafe Victoria is dedicated to improving the health and safety of workers. As part of this commitment we strive to ensure workplaces have access to the most up to date strategic, evidence based occupational health and safety advice through suitably qualified OHS professionals.

The Safety Institute of Australia (SIA), in collaboration with industry and health and safety professional bodies, is now able to present this body of knowledge, providing consistent standards to guide OHS educators and professionals.

This work leads the way to consistent education for OHS professionals through accreditation of tertiary courses and is a credit to the extensive knowledge contributed by OHS educators and experts from around Australia. The accreditation process will play a significant role in both raising the standard of professional OHS advice and giving employers great confidence when engaging OHS expertise.

I would particularly like to thank the team from the SIA for their dedication and hard work, the Technical Panel for contributing their knowledge and coveted time to this important project, and the Health and Safety Professionals Alliance (HaSPA) that steered the project. Most importantly I acknowledge the significant contributions of the chapter authors. Without their work the Body of Knowledge could not have been written.

SIA and all parties involved can all be extremely proud of this piece of work and the collaborative spirit in which it was created. In developing these standards for education, SIA has achieved an acknowledged world first and generated much international interest. I have no doubt it will be of huge benefit to the OHS profession and as a result, the safety of workers.

Greg Tweedly  
Chief Executive  
WorkSafe Victoria



## OHS Body of Knowledge Technical Panel

The Technical Panel established by the Health and Safety Professionals Alliance (HaSPA) was responsible for developing the conceptual framework of the OHS Body of Knowledge and for selecting contributing authors and peer-reviewers. Members of the Technical Panel were not remunerated.

The Technical Panel comprised representatives of:



Members of the Technical Panel were:

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Dr David Borys (University of Ballarat)

Susan Leggett (University of Ballarat) (part)

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## Acknowledgements

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This project was made possible with financial support and assistance from *WorkSafe Victoria*.

### **Health and Safety Professionals Alliance (HaSPA)**

*HaSPA* as the official owner of the project provided high level direction and gave regular feedback on progress reports.

### **Safety Institute of Australia**

The *Safety Institute of Australia* was not only the contract holder and responsible for financial governance but provided resources such as meeting and teleconference facilities. The SIA also coordinated arrangements for engagements session and consultative processes.

### **Chair of the Technical Panel**

*Pam Pryor* as chair of the Technical Panel liaised with authors and peer reviewers during writing of the Body of Knowledge also undertaking an editorial function directed to chapter layout and support for contributing authors..

### **Project Administration**

*Sally Bennett* of Enhance Solutions undertook project management and administration together with workshop facilitation. Her expert professional advice was invaluable.

### **Editorial**

*Dr Anne Statham* PhD, BBus, MBus(Comm) was the academic editor. Anne's editorial support went beyond the normal scope of the editorial role and the Technical Panel wishes to acknowledge their appreciation for her commitment to the task. As the respective authors for each chapter and the Chair of the Technical Panel had final chapter approval, any errors or inconsistencies are theirs.

*Leo Ruschena* provided considerable editorial and technical support in developing early drafts of some chapters and in the final production

### **Graphics**

Graphics were developed or re-drawn by *Laura Kelly* of Rewire Group Pty Ltd.

### **Consultative Processes**

Workshops and focus groups conducted as part of the OHS Body of Knowledge development process included:

- A two-day workshop attended by 40 OHS educators from throughout Australia
- SIA College of Fellows Professional Reference convened for the project
- Eight workshops conducted in all states and the ACT attended by 137 OHS professionals
- Focus groups conducted as part of developing the Model of OHS practice, involving approximately 30 OHS professionals.

While participants in these events are too numerous to name individually, the Technical Panel is appreciative of their time and interest and values their input.

## Contributing Authors

The Technical Panel selected authors on the basis of their demonstrated, specialist expertise. Contributing authors were not remunerated; they wrote the chapters in their own time as part of their contributions to the OHS profession and to workplace health and safety. The authors of the OHS Body of Knowledge are:

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## Peer-reviewers

The peer-review process was vital to the quality and rigour of the content of the OHS Body of Knowledge. The OHS Body of Knowledge Technical Panel would like to acknowledge those who committed their time and expertise to provide thoughtful and constructive feedback as part of the drafting of the chapters. The Technical Panel is appreciative of the input provided by the peer reviewers listed below along with those few who preferred to remain anonymous.

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## From the Chair of the Technical Panel

As Patrick Hudson clearly demonstrated in his 2010 Dr Eric Wigglesworth Memorial Lecture on *Rethinking Safety*, OHS is not rocket science, it's much harder. While recognising that everybody has a stake, and therefore a role, in workplace health and safety one of the objectives of the OHS Body of Knowledge is to support and encourage evidence-based practice by OHS professionals.

The development of the OHS Body of Knowledge has been a bit like giving birth. There has been a long gestation period with some challenges along the way; the delivery has taken longer than expected; and, while the outcome has been very gratifying, this is just the beginning. There will be a maturation process requiring nurturing by many people and caring custodianship.

The OHS Body of Knowledge, 2012, is not intended to be a definitive statement, fixed in time. Rather it should be subject to continual reinterpretation and evolution as people engage with it, apply it, and extend it by research. Therefore this is the beginning of the discussion; a discussion that should occur on a national and international basis. It is proposed that this discussion will be facilitated by:

- An interactive web site facilitating evidence-based comment and input
- Workshops conducted in Australia with specialists and practicing OHS professionals to test and interpret the content of specific chapters and to clarify the scope of content in terms of the role of the generalist OHS professional
- Extension of these workshops to include international specialists; also with some workshops being held in other countries as part of the SIA's involvement with the International Network of Safety and Health Professional Organizations (INSHPO).

As with any work of such vast scope and compiled from the input of so many there will be those who think we have not got it quite right. I call on those people to be part of the discussion.

The OHS Body of Knowledge is just one part of the OHS Body of Knowledge project that has informed the establishment of the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board to accredit OHS professional education programs and the creation of a certification process for generalist OHS professionals.

The OHS Body of Knowledge Technical Panel has been on quite a journey over the last three years, one that has forced us to think about our approach to and understanding of OHS in general and some aspects of OHS in particular. I encourage all OHS professionals to embark on a similar journey, to engage with the Body of Knowledge and in constructive discussion about the content. I also implore all OHS professionals to explore the scope of their work and the links with professionals in other OHS disciplines and work together to optimise workplace health and safety for all Australians.

While many people are recognised in the Acknowledgements I would personally like to thank all those who have contributed to the project and assisted me personally: the Technical Panel who tolerated my sometimes pedantic approach; the many authors and peer reviewers who I chased and sometimes nagged, Anne Statham the editor, the SIA, and of course Clarke Martin and his colleagues at WorkSafe Victoria. There has been a great commitment by many people and I think we have a really worthwhile result. Now let the discussion begin.



Pam Pryor BSc.BEd.GDipOHS.FSIA  
Chair OHS Body of Knowledge Technical Panel





# PREFACE

## Background

A defined body of knowledge is required as a basis for professional certification and for accreditation of education programs giving entry to a profession. The lack of such a body of knowledge for OHS professionals was identified in reviews of OHS legislation and OHS education in Australia. After a 2009 scoping study, WorkSafe Victoria provided funding to support a national project to develop and implement a core body of knowledge for generalist OHS professionals in Australia.

## Development

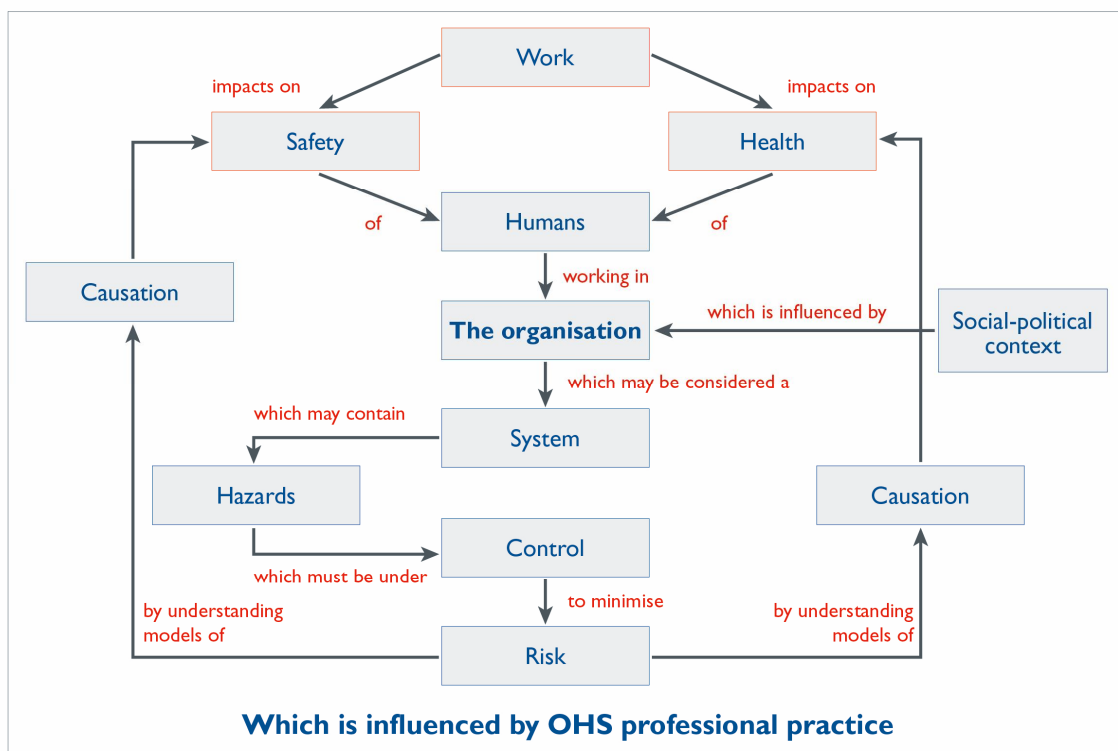
The process of developing and structuring the main content of this document was managed by a Technical Panel with representation from Victorian universities that teach OHS and from the Safety Institute of Australia, which is the main professional body for generalist OHS professionals in Australia. The Panel developed an initial conceptual framework which was then amended in accord with feedback received from OHS tertiary-level educators throughout Australia and the wider OHS profession. Specialist authors were invited to contribute chapters, which were then subjected to peer review and editing. It is anticipated that the resultant OHS Body of Knowledge will in future be regularly amended and updated as people use it and as the evidence base expands.

## Conceptual structure

The OHS Body of Knowledge takes a 'conceptual' approach. As concepts are abstract, the OHS professional needs to organise the concepts into a framework in order to solve a problem. The overall framework used to structure the OHS Body of Knowledge is that:

**Work** impacts on the **safety** and **health** of humans who work in **organisations**. Organisations are influenced by the **socio-political context**. Organisations may be considered a **system** which may contain **hazards** which must be under control to minimise **risk**. This can be achieved by understanding **models causation** for safety and for health which will result in improvement in the safety and health of people at work. The OHS professional applies **professional practice** to influence the organisation to being about this improvement.

This can be represented as:



### Audience

The OHS Body of Knowledge provides a basis for accreditation of OHS professional education programs and certification of individual OHS professionals. It provides guidance for OHS educators in course development, and for OHS professionals and professional bodies in developing continuing professional development activities. Also, OHS regulators, employers and recruiters may find it useful for benchmarking OHS professional practice.

### Application

Importantly, the OHS Body of Knowledge is neither a textbook nor a curriculum; rather it describes the key concepts, core theories and related evidence that should be shared by Australian generalist OHS professionals. This knowledge will be gained through a combination of education and experience.

### Accessing and using the OHS Body of Knowledge for generalist OHS professionals

The OHS Body of Knowledge is published electronically. Each chapter can be downloaded separately. However users are advised to read the Introduction, which provides background to the information in individual chapters. They should also note the copyright requirements and the disclaimer before using or acting on the information.

**Note 1:** References to national Model Work Health and Safety Regulations (WHSR) refer to the 2010 draft as the final regulations were not available at the time of writing. Readers should refer to the current version of the regulations and Work Health and Safety Act.

**Note 2:** It is recognised that as part of the further development of the OHS Body of Knowledge additional chapters may be required. It is likely that at least some of these may be in the area of 'practice'. For example one area of practice that may warrant a chapter is that of 'Investigation'. We welcome suggestions for other chapters.