

Enforceable Undertakings and the OHS Body of Knowledge

1 Invitation

As a highly regarded WHS lawyer, some of your clients may, at some time, face an Enforceable Undertaking (EU). Each regulator requires that EUs meet three requirements:

- Benefit to the workplace
- Benefit to the industry
- Benefit to the community.

The purpose of this document is to introduce you to the OHS Body of Knowledge (OHS BoK) as a potential component of an EU that is:

- Of benefit to the workplace, industry and the community;
- Has both national and international impact; and
- Will add a legacy aspect to any EU through its ongoing currency and enduring impact.

The WHS regulators in Victoria, NSW and Queensland have stated their support for the inclusion of the OHS Body of Knowledge in EUs.

2 What is the OHS Body of Knowledge?

The *OHS Body of Knowledge for Generalist OHS Professionals* is an open-source resource that provides a collation of current research and practice in OHS in a format that is easily accessible while clearly drawing on the evidence base.

The OHS Body of Knowledge is possibly the single most important resource informing the practice of Occupational Health and Safety; its application having a direct impact on the capability of OHS professionals and the quality of OHS advice that they provide in Australian workplaces.

The OHS Body of Knowledge consists of more than 40 chapters describing key concepts that define the collective knowledge shared by Australian Generalist OHS Professionals as a basis for understanding the causation and control of work-related fatality, injury, disease and ill-health. These chapters are supported by topic-specific resources.

The OHS Body of Knowledge is not a text book, nor is it 'opinion pieces'. Each chapter is developed by a topic specific technical panel, authored by a subject specialist(s) and professionally edited, referencing the best available national and international peer-reviewed research.

The OHS Body of Knowledge website includes a 'Resources' page which is being developed to include chapter-specific resources focused on practical implementation of the chapter content.

The Safety Institute of Australia (SIA) owns the copyright of the OHS BoK with the copyright for the 1st edition being under license from the first funder, WorkSafe Victoria. The Institute remains committed to providing the OHS Body of Knowledge to the community open source and free of charge in perpetuity.

A synopsis of the OHS BoK is provided in Attachment 1. The OHS BoK is freely available and can be accessed at www.ohsbok.org.au.

3 Who uses the OHS Body of Knowledge?

The OHS Body of Knowledge:

- Is part of the accreditation criteria for OHS professional education, with qualifications assessed by the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board, with assessments articulated against the OHS Body of Knowledge
- Is used by universities in developing OHS professional qualifications and is included in student reading lists
- Provides a basis for individual professional certifications awarded by the Safety Institute of Australia and is increasingly being referenced by other professional bodies, both national and international¹
- Provides a benchmark for continuing professional development for OHS professionals and practitioners
- While designed for OHS professionals is increasingly being accessed by anybody requiring evidenced-based OHS information.

4 How can the OHS Body of Knowledge be supported through an EU?

The OHS Body of Knowledge is maintained by the Safety Institute of Australia. Updating of current chapters, development of new chapters and development of resources is dependent on funding.

Financial support for the OHS BoK may be directed to:

- The OHS Body of Knowledge overall
- Specific chapter topics
- The development of resources for specific topics
- Projects to enhance the engagement of the OHS community in the OHS Body of Knowledge more generally.

A list of OHS Body of Knowledge chapters, current and planned, is available at

<http://www.ohsbok.org.au/development/conceptual-structure/>.

The general or specific nature of the support may be discussed with the Safety Institute of Australia as part of formulating the EU.

5 How does supporting the OHS Body of Knowledge meet the principles of an EU?

Benefit to the workplace

By engaging with the OHS Body of Knowledge the employer, and the regulator, can be assured that the resource (and workplace action) are underpinned by the OHS evidence-base and current OHS thinking and practice.

The workplace-focused activities required under an EU that address the circumstances leading to a contravention can be developed as 'resources' to support the implementation of specific OHS Body of Knowledge topics and so have an impact beyond the individual workplace or company.

¹ See for example <http://inshpo.org/work.php> and http://www.ergonomics.org.au/resource_library/the-ohs-body-of-knowledge.

Benefit to the industry

Industry benefits that will flow from supporting the OHS Body of Knowledge include promulgation of evidenced-based best practice that is freely and widely available to all stakeholders in both specific and broader industry communities.

Benefit to the community

The OHS Body of Knowledge is dedicated to improving work health and safety in Australia, and so benefitting not only Australian workers but their families and others who may be impacted by workplace fatality, injury or ill-health.

The Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-22 has the vision of “healthy, safe and productive working lives”. The OHS Body of Knowledge directly contributes to two of the seven strategic action areas in the Strategy.

<i>Health and safety capabilities</i>	Those providing work health and safety education, training and advice have appropriate capabilities.
<i>Research and evaluation</i>	Evidence is translated to assist practical application. The results of research and evaluation are disseminated and implemented.

Thus, support for the OHS Body of Knowledge is support for the Australian WHS Strategy which benefits all Australians.

6 What are the benefits to the employer of supporting the OHS Body of Knowledge?

Underpinning education in OHS, and supporting the knowledge and skills development of the profession, the OHS Body of Knowledge is the single most important and influential resource in Australia enhancing the effectiveness of the health and safety advice received by Australian industry. Investing in the OHS Body of Knowledge means investing in better health and safety.

In directing their EU commitment to the OHS Body of Knowledge, employers not only meet their regulated obligations, but they can also be assured that their contribution to improving workplace safety is evidenced-based and will have a legacy beyond the immediate workplace and industry.

Should the conditions of the EU allow, and it is the employers preference, the employer may:

- Be included in the chapter or resource development and so gain expertise
- Be acknowledged for their contribution and support for the OHS Body of Knowledge
- Be involved in ongoing OHS Body of Knowledge activities.

For further information on the OHS Body of Knowledge and the development of EUs contact:

Pam Pryor, Manager OHS Body of Knowledge Development, manager@ohsbok.org.au or +61 (0) 411 193 370.

Appendix 1: Synopsis of OHS Body of Knowledge

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 2008 through 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

As at February 2017, there have been two 'editions' of the OHS Body of Knowledge. The first edition was published in 2012 with a further four chapters released over 2014-15. Work continues on additional chapters with three planned for release through 2017.

The process of developing and structuring the main content of the first edition was managed by a Technical Panel with representation from Victorian universities that teach OHS and from the Safety Institute of 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. The development of the second edition and future chapters has been overseen by topic specific technical panels who in some cases have also been contributing authors. The actual authoring of the chapter has usually been by one or two principal authors.

With reference to key papers, each chapter of the OHS BoK gives a synoptic overview of a concept, its development and its application to understanding the causation and control of work-related fatality, injury, disease and ill-health (FIDI). The Body of Knowledge is not a textbook detailing all that the OHS professional needs to know; rather, it provides a 'picture' of current thinking that highlights key concepts and how thinking on these evolved.

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 contains **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 bring about this improvement.

