

ESF IMPACT

newsletter

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Navigating the new Psychosocial Regulations

ESF brought together people from across the sector for a webinar with health and safety expert Catherine Dunlop – Partner at Maddocks – to discuss the proposed new Psychosocial Regulations, current best practice thinking and what this will practically mean for the sector.

Australian governments in all States and Territories committed back in 2020 to provide more detail for safety duty holders on their obligations for psychosocial hazards. In Victoria draft regulations and a regulatory impact statement were made available last year, and we are awaiting the government's decision on what is next.

The draft regulations (and the regulations and relevant codes interstate) provide a revised hierarchy of control and move away from a reactive approach to require employers to consider how work is designed, how risks are monitored and how workers are to be consulted. This raises challenges for employers with traditional command and control cultures, and/or where managers are already facing issues with managing staff.

Underlying the proposed new Regulations is a shift of focus away from fixing the person to addressing the hazard which led to a problem. This means that organizations need to understand underlying sources of harm before control measures can be applied to manage psychosocial risk. Catherine urged us to see this as an opportunity and not an obligation.

Psychosocial hazards are factors in the design or management of work that increase the risk of work-related stress and can lead to psychological or physical harm. Examples of psychosocial hazards might include poor supervisor support or high job demands.

Employees are likely to be exposed to a combination of psychosocial hazards. Some hazards might always be present at work, while others only occasionally. There is a greater risk of work-related stress when psychosocial hazards combine and act together, so employers should not consider hazards in isolation.

While employee surveys can point to concerns related to psychosocial hazards, they will not identify the specific circumstances involved. Most critical is a discussion with employees about the issues identified because employees can be a great source of solutions relevant to their unique working conditions.

RESPONSES

The presentation took us on a journey of the evolution of psychological health. It was helpful to understand how various reviews have informed the development of the Regulations. The practical application and insights presented will assist agencies to better understand what we now need to start working towards now in regard to psychosocial hazards.

Nicole Middleton, DECCA

It was such a fabulous session. Catherine's expertise in the field made it not only insightful and informative but engaging also. Catherine clarified the changes, explaining what we can be doing to prepare, highlighting our obligations, and what it means for our industry specifically. I really enjoyed the specific examples and presentation. Thanks ESF for another beneficial session that will help all emergency services organisations prepare for such a fundamental change that can be implemented as a beneficial activity for our people and not just a 'tick in the box' exercise.

Kyle West, ESTA

What an amazing synopsis and overview! Consideration of the new risk management perspectives and hierarchy of controls are on the priority list now! I am also inspired to research job control and job crafting tools.

Kellie Shewring, CEO VCCEM

For a recording of the webinar with Catherine Dunlop [click here](#).