Is the risk management model and hierarchy of control relevant for psychosocial risks?

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Keywords: risk management, hierarchy of controls, psychosocial hazards.

Objective:

An oral presentation will be used to explain the application of the risk management model, and hierarchy of control, for psychosocial hazards and risks.

Target Audience:

Those interested in or responsible for preventing workplace exposure to psychosocial hazards and risks.

1. Background

Safe Work Australia is the body responsible for developing national policy on work health and safety and workers’ compensation matters. A key function of Safe Work Australia has been to develop the model work health and safety Act and model regulations for adoption across Australia.

2. Work Health and Safety law and current thinking

The Australian Work Health and Safety (WHS) legislative instruments require workplace hazards and risks to be identified and controlled. These include risks to health and safety. ‘Health’ is defined in the WHS Act to include both physical and psychological health.

Workers’ health and safety can be adversely affected by exposure to a poorly designed or managed work, working environments and or systems of work. These factors can increase the likelihood of workers experiencing a stress response which in turn can lead to either physical or psychological harm.

The WHS Regulations require duty holders to work through the hierarchy of control when managing risks under the WHS Regulations. Recent publications by some academics argue that the standard hierarchy of control cannot be applied to the prevention of work-related psychological harm and a new model is required.

1.1 Practical application of the law to psychosocial hazards

The current model is described in legislation and there is a risk employers may become confused if alternative models are advocated—a clear national position by Safe Work Australia is needed.

Safe Work Australia will argue the existing risk management approach and models controls remain valid and will explain how these can be applied to psychosocial risks.

Some employers perceive they are held responsible for circumstances which are outside their ability to control. The discussion will include application of the model and approaches where the individual worker’s circumstances are creating part of overall psychosocial hazard or risks.

The application of the concepts within the model Code of Practice for Managing Work Health and Safety Risks, the information sheet on Preventing psychological injury under work health and safety laws and Principles for Good Work Design will be discussed.

References
Safe Work Australia, 2014, “Preventing psychological injury under work health and safety laws fact sheet”
Safe Work Australia, 2014, Managing risks to work health and safety fact sheet
Safe Work Australia, 2013, “Guide for preventing and responding to workplace bullying”
Safe Work Australia, 2013, “Guide for managing the risk of fatigue at work”

Note: Length of paper is maximum 8 pages including references