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## PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

14 MAY 1978

### OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH CODE FOR COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

The Government has decided to implement the Code of General Principles on Safety and Health designed to protect Commonwealth employees from injury through work accidents and to promote maximum occupational health.

This decision will give a lead to industry and commerce in cutting down the one million man weeks now lost to Australia every year through industrial accidents and injuries.

Absences from work through accident and illness are greater than from industrial disputes and seriously affect national productivity.

The direct cost to the nation of work injuries is now estimated to be about \$1,400m a year. In the area of Commonwealth employment alone for 1975-76 \$21m went in compensation payments. This indicates that there is scope for considerable improvement in industrial safety and health despite the efforts of many organisations to safeguard their employees.

The Code provides for control of the physical environment and also for training, consultation between managers and employees, and their maximum involvement in accident prevention measures.

It defines the responsibilities of people at various levels in Commonwealth departments and authorities in promoting safety and good working conditions.

The Code of Principles -- supplemented by detailed Codes of Practice -- covers all aspects of industrial health and safety for Commonwealth employees.

These include the scope and definition of safety measures; safety co-ordination; provision of a safe and healthy working environment; machine, plant and equipment safety; personal protective equipment; hygiene; special measures to protect employees in the field or in isolated areas; health, medical and first-aid services; accident records, statistics and investigation.

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The Department of Productivity will be responsible for generally oversighting and evaluating the Code's effectiveness; the Director-General of Health will have responsibility for occupational health recommendations.

The Code is a major step forward in the area of occupational safety and health for Commonwealth employees. Several states have adopted Codes which follow it closely with minor revisions. Indeed, a representative of State Labour Departments assisted in the development of the Code, as of course did representatives of trade and Public Service unions.

The Department of Productivity will continue working in association with State Departments of Labour, unions, employers and other interested groups in the community to improve safety and health for people at work.

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**Occupational Safety  
and Health  
in  
Australian  
Government  
Employment**

## **PREFACE**

This Code of General Principles on Occupational Safety and Health in Australian Government Employment was developed by a Government sponsored Committee comprising representatives from the following departments and organisations:

Department of Health

Department of Housing and Construction

Department of Labor and Immigration

Department of Manufacturing Industry

Postmaster-General's Department

Public Service Board

Representatives from Australian Council of Trade Unions

Representatives from Council of Australian Government Employee Organisations

Representatives from the Committee of Chief Inspectors of State Labour Departments

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## FOREWORD

On 10 September 1974, the Australian Government agreed that Ministers direct departments and statutory authorities for which they have responsibility, to apply the Code of General Principles on Occupational Safety and Health in Australian Government Employment.

The Department of Labor and Immigration has responsibility for the general oversight in relation to the implementation of the Code except for occupational health recommendations which will be determined by the Director-General of Health, Department of Health.

The purpose of this Code is to protect persons employed by the Australian Government from accidental injury and to promote the maximum degree of health and well being. Because any work injury results from inter-reaction between a worker and his or her working environment, there is no such thing as absolute safety. Maximum safety cannot be ensured by control of the environment alone but demands the understanding and co-operation of all persons at all levels.

Consequently the Code provides not only for the control of the physical environment, but for training, consultation between management and employees, and their maximum involvement in all accident prevention measures.

The Code also defines the responsibilities of persons at all levels in departments and instrumentalities in the promotion of safety and good working conditions.

Only two categories of persons are recognised; head officers and employees. The latter term therefore includes persons at all levels in the service, all of whom are seen as having responsibilities for safety commensurate with their positions.

While the Code of General Principles defines responsibilities for safety and health and states in broad terms the action that shall be taken to fulfil them, it does not provide detailed information on the standards required.

This information is to be provided in the corresponding detailed provisions. These will be collated from accepted standards and codes of practice, recommendations agreed by the State Departments of Labour, State regulations and other information as applicable. The detailed provisions will be issued as separate publications.

These provisions will be taken as providing the criteria by which observance of the Code is to be judged.



## SECTION 1

### SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS

#### 1.1 Scope

This Code lays down the measures required by the Australian Government to safeguard the safety and health of all employees of the Australian Government while they are at work and wherever they may be working.

#### 1.2 Definitions

In this Code the following definitions apply:

**1.2.1 Department** — any department of the Australian Government. For the purpose of this code, any establishment, undertaking, etc., under the control of a permanent head of a department is considered as part of that department.

**1.2.2 Instrumentality** — any agency of the Australian Government, other than a department, reporting to a Minister of the Australian Government.

**1.2.3 Head Officer** — the permanent head of a department, or the chief functional officer of an instrumentality.

**1.2.4 Employee** — a person of any classification or grade employed by any department or instrumentality and engaged in activities for which he receives direct payment.

**1.2.5 Accident** — any event arising out of employment which results in work injury, damage to property or the possibility of such injury or damage to property.

**1.2.6 Work Injury** — any injury, poisoning, disease or disability to an employee, or the recurrence or exacerbation of any such injury, disease, or disability, which arises out of employment.

**1.2.7 Safe, Safety** — the condition in which persons are protected from the risk of work injury so far as is practicable in the light of current knowledge, through control of the working environment, work methods, machinery, plant and equipment, and through measures to influence the human factors conducive to accidents and injuries.

**1.2.8 Work Place** — any place where an employee is required to be or has occasion to go during the course of his employment.

**1.2.9 Personal Protective Equipment** — clothing and equipment intended to be worn or used by employees and designed to protect against work injury.

## SECTION 2

### OBLIGATIONS OF HEAD OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES

#### 2.1 Head Officers

Every head officer shall be responsible for ensuring that the provisions contained in this Code are applied in his department or instrumentality. Measures to be taken shall include:

2.1.1 The issue of a statement of safety policy and responsibilities. (Section 3)

2.1.2 The adoption of arrangements for joint consultation with employees on safety matters. (Section 4)

2.1.3 The appointment of safety co-ordinators. (Section 5)

2.1.4 The provision of safe work places and a safe working environment. (Section 6)

2.1.5 The provision of safe plant, machinery and equipment. (Section 7)

2.1.6 The adoption of safe work methods and appropriate training and placement of employees. (Section 8)

2.1.7 The adoption of occupational hygiene principles and control of harmful chemical and physical agents. (Section 9)

2.1.8 The adoption of measures to minimise the risk of, and harmful effects of, fire and explosion. (Section 10)

2.1.9 The provision of appropriate personal protective equipment and the adoption of measures to ensure its proper use. (Section 11)

2.1.10 The establishment of medical, health and first-aid services. (Section 12)

2.1.11 The maintenance of injury and accident records and arrangements for accident investigation. (Section 13)

#### 2.2 Employees

2.2.1 Each employee shall have responsibility for safe working consistent with the extent of his control over or influence on working conditions and methods.

2.2.2 Each employee shall take such action as is within his competence and responsibility or report or make such recommendation to a higher level as he deems necessary to avoid, eliminate, or minimise hazards of which he is aware in regard to working conditions or methods.

2.2.3 Each employee shall observe all instructions issued to protect his safety or the safety of others.

2.2.4 Each employee shall make proper use, or to the extent of his responsibility ensure that proper use is made, of all safeguards, safety devices, personal protective equipment and other appliances provided for safety purposes.

2.2.5 No employee shall, or shall cause another employee to, interfere with, remove, displace or render ineffective any safeguard, safety device, personal protective equipment or other appliance provided for safety purposes, except when necessary as part of an approved maintenance or repair procedure.

### SECTION 3

## STATEMENT OF SAFETY POLICY AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Each head officer shall issue and disseminate throughout his department or instrumentality a written statement of safety policy which he shall periodically review, expressing the aim of safe working, the requirement to comply with the provisions of this Code and in broad terms, the means by which compliance will be achieved and maintained.

The statement shall indicate:

- the obligations and responsibilities of employees at all levels (Section 2.2)
- the provisions for employee consultation and participation in safety activities (Section 4)
- the provisions for co-ordination of safety activities (Section 5).

### SECTION 4

## ARRANGEMENTS FOR JOINT CONSULTATION WITH EMPLOYEES ON SAFETY MATTERS

#### 4.1

Each head officer shall ensure that arrangements for safety within his department or instrumentality provide for the participation of employees at all levels, in planning and implementing safety policy.

Measures shall include:

**4.1.1** The establishment of an occupational safety and health committee on policy, which will include management, trade union and other employee representatives. This committee should have oversight of executive action taken to implement the policy.

**4.1.2** The establishment of occupational safety and health committees at executive and operational levels, which will include management, trade union and other employee representatives, except where the nature of the work, the number of employees or other organisational circumstances render the operation of such committees inappropriate, in which case other standing arrangements agreed by management and the employees concerned shall be made for joint consultation and action.

**4.1.3** Consultation with appropriate employee representatives on particular problems of safety and health.

**4.1.4** Keeping all employees informed on accident prevention activities through such measures as written communications, meetings, lectures, films, departmental newsletters and other means of communications.

## SECTION 5

### SAFETY CO-ORDINATION

#### 5.1 Safety Co-Ordination Responsibility

Responsibility for safety co-ordination throughout the department or instrumentality shall be included in the functions of a senior management position having direct access to the head officer or his deputy.

#### 5.2 Safety Co-Ordination Duties

Safety co-ordination duties shall include:

5.2.1 Formulation and implementation of plans to promote interest in and action on safety.

5.2.2 Surveillance of accident and injury experience.

5.2.3 Inspections of work areas, continual reviews of safety measures.

5.2.4 Study and dissemination of relevant information on safety from sources both inside and outside the department or instrumentality.

5.2.5 Advice to all levels of management on safety matters.

5.2.6 Preparation of an annual report on safety experience and performance.

#### 5.3 Safety Officers

To carry out these duties the head officer shall, as necessary, appoint other officers who may be employed either full-time on safety or in association with other duties. The number of such officers, their qualifications and classifications and their full or part-time assignment shall be consistent with the size of the department or instrumentality, the geographic scatter of its locations and the nature of its operations and hazards.

## SECTION 6

### WORKPLACES AND THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

#### 6.1 Working Environment

Head officers shall ensure that every practicable measure is taken to provide a safe and healthy working environment for employees both in fixed locations and in temporary and outdoor locations.

#### 6.2 Buildings and Workplaces

Buildings and where practicable workplaces, shall be planned, designed, constructed, prepared and maintained so that:

6.2.1 Structures have adequate strength and stability.

6.2.2 Working surfaces are adequately drained and provide good foothold.

**6.2.3** Adequate working space is provided for operational and maintenance work with a minimum of congestion, obstruction to movement or risk of collision.

**6.2.4** Order, cleanliness and hygienic standards are maintained.

**6.2.5** Adequate lighting is provided.

**6.2.6** Adequate ventilation and satisfactory thermal conditions are provided.

**6.2.7** Safe means of access to and egress from workplaces are provided, including quick egress in case of fire or other emergency and ready access for fire fighting purposes.

**6.2.8** There is adequate resistance to the spread of fire and, where appropriate, safe relief of explosion pressure, adequate fire fighting and rescue equipment available, clearly identified and ready for use.

**6.2.9** To the greatest extent practicable the design, construction and layout of buildings and workplaces facilitate measures taken to reduce personal exposures to harmful physical and chemical agents.

**6.2.10** Electrical, fuel, compressed air, steam or other services are installed in a safe manner.

**6.2.11** There are adequate means of communication so that safety, health or rescue needs become known without delay.

**6.2.12** Adequate sanitary installations are provided.

**6.2.13** The use of materials therein and the use of furniture and fittings are such as to reduce the risk of personal exposure to harmful chemical and physical agents in the event of fire.

**6.3 Confined Spaces**

Special procedures shall be followed based on written instructions for the safety of persons required to work in confined spaces.

**6.4 Isolated Situations**

Special measures shall be adopted to protect the safety and health of employees required to work in the field or in isolated situations.

## SECTION 7

### **MACHINERY, PLANT AND EQUIPMENT**

- 7.1 General** Head officers shall ensure that all machinery, plant and equipment is safe including mobile or vehicular machinery, plant and equipment, and portable appliances.
- 7.2 Protection Against Failure or Faulty Operation** The design, construction, location and maintenance of machinery, plant and equipment shall be such as to minimise the risk of, or the harmful effects of, failure of parts, collapse, bursting, fire, explosion, faulty operation, electrical shock, and exposure to harmful physical and chemical agents.
- 7.3 Guarding** Portions of machinery, plant and equipment that are not constructed so as to be permanently safe shall be guarded or screened to the greatest practicable extent, and special procedures shall be implemented so as to prevent injury to employees or other persons.

## SECTION 8

### **SAFE WORK METHODS AND APPROPRIATE TRAINING AND PLACEMENT OF EMPLOYEES**

- 8.1 Work Methods** Head officers shall ensure that safe methods of work are established and reviewed from time to time in the light of experience or changed circumstances. Where unusual or serious hazards are involved, the proper methods shall be defined in written instructions.
- 8.2 Placement of Employees** An employee shall be assigned only to a task which he can perform safely. Where doubt exists, or on request by the employee, he shall be referred for medical examination.
- For tasks in which a high degree of operating skill and correct procedures are critical to safety, standards of competence shall be defined and measures taken to ensure that they are met.
- 8.3 Induction of New Employees** Arrangements shall be made for new employees or employees transferred to new locations, to be instructed in the rules for safe working in their tasks and advised on any particular hazards associated with them.
- Special measures shall be taken to ensure that new employees not familiar with the English language fully understand the training given to them.

**8.4 Training**

Head officers shall ensure that all employees are trained and periodically retrained as necessary, in the safe practice of their employment.

Machinery, plant and equipment, the use of which can involve serious risk of accident or injury to operators or others, shall be operated only by employees specially trained and qualified in its operation.

**8.5 Supervision**

Head officers shall provide for competent supervision to ensure that safe procedures are followed and that unsafe methods and hazards in the workplace are corrected.

**SECTION 9**

**OCCUPATIONAL HYGIENE  
CONTROL OF HARMFUL CHEMICAL AND  
PHYSICAL AGENTS**

**9.1 General**

Where harmful chemical and physical agents are used, produced, released, transported, stored, handled or otherwise may be present, head officers shall ensure that steps are taken to keep personal exposures to such agents within safe limits and that such steps comply with recommendations of the Director-General of Health.

**9.2 Installations  
and Processes**

Head officers shall ensure that when new chemical and physical agents that may be harmful are introduced or when new installations or processes involve the use, generation or release of chemical or physical agents that may be harmful, the use of such agents and the design of such installations or processes shall comply with the recommendations of the Director-General of Health.

**9.3 Exposure to  
Harmful  
Chemical  
Agents**

No employee shall be exposed to harmful chemical agents, whether by skin contact, inhalation or ingestion at levels exceeding those approved by the Director-General of Health.

**9.4 Exposure to  
Harmful  
Physical  
Agents**

No employee shall be exposed to harmful physical agents such as dust, noise, vibration, extremes of temperature or radiation except at levels and under conditions approved by the Director-General of Health.

**9.5 Measurement  
of Exposure  
to Airborne  
Contaminants**

Methods for sampling, measurement and reporting of concentrations of airborne contaminants shall be those approved by the Director-General of Health.

- 9.6 Controls** Measures for the control of harmful physical and chemical agents to approved levels shall comply with the recommendations of the Director-General of Health.
- 9.7 Confined Spaces** Safe procedures shall be established for the entry of employees into confined spaces or any location in which air may be contaminated or deficient in oxygen.
- Procedures shall govern conditions for pre-entry, occupancy, communication, rescue and first aid.
- 9.8 Advice to Employees** Where it is possible for employees to be exposed to harmful physical or chemical agents, they shall be informed and reminded of the nature of the agents and their adverse health effects and of any steps they should take to ensure that exposures are kept within safe limits.

## **SECTION 10**

### **FIRE AND EXPLOSION**

- 10.1 Fire and Explosion Risks** Where combustible, flammable or explosive substances are used, produced, released, transported, stored, handled or otherwise may be present, head officers shall ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to minimise the risk of uncontrolled escape or accumulation of such substances and the risk of ignition or initiation of explosion, and to minimise the spread of fire and the harmful effects of explosion.
- 10.1.1** Employees who work with or in the vicinity of flammable or explosive substances, shall be informed and reminded of the fire or explosion risk and effectively trained in the steps they should take to avoid such an occurrence.
- 10.2 Fire Fighting Equipment**
- 10.2.1** In all buildings and workplaces adequate fire-fighting equipment shall be provided together with means for quickly calling community fire fighting services where available.
- 10.2.2** Where required for the safety of persons, adequate fire detecting equipment shall be provided.
- 10.2.3** Sufficient employees shall be trained in early fire fighting so that effective use is made of the equipment available.
- 10.3 Evacuation** In all buildings, and in other work places where appropriate, head officers shall ensure that there is a plan and an organisation for the quick evacuation of employees to safe areas. Employees shall be informed and practice evacuations shall be carried out at appropriate intervals.



## SECTION 11

### PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

- 11.1 Use of Personal Protective Equipment** Head officers shall ensure that personal protective equipment is supplied for the protection of employees against hazards that cannot be controlled satisfactorily by other means.
- 11.2 Types and Specifications of Equipment** Personal protective equipment supplied as protection against a particular hazard shall be in accordance with the recommendations of the Director-General of Health.
- 11.3 Promotion of Use** Head officers shall take measures to ensure the proper use of personal protective equipment including education, instruction and supervision.
- 11.4 Maintenance of Equipment** Equipment shall be maintained in a clean, hygienic and effective condition and kept readily available for use.
- 11.5 Equipment For Use in Emergency** In locations where plant failures or accidents could cause conditions of danger due to harmful chemical or physical agents, personal protective equipment capable of protecting persons against such conditions shall be supplied for the use of employees engaged in repair, fire fighting, or rescue operations.

## SECTION 12

### HEALTH, MEDICAL AND FIRST-AID SERVICES

Head officers shall ensure that medical, health and first-aid services are provided in their departments or instrumentalities in accordance with the requirements and recommendations of the Director-General of Health.

## SECTION 13

### ACCIDENT RECORDS, STATISTICS AND INVESTIGATION

- 13.1** Head officers shall arrange for the prompt investigation of all accidents, the determination of causes and contributory factors and the implementation of corrective action.
- 13.2 Records of Accidents and Injuries** Records of accidents and injuries shall be kept and periodic returns made in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Labor and Immigration.

## ADDRESSES OF THE IMPLEMENTING AUTHORITY

For further information on the Code, please contact the nearest office of the implementing authority listed below:

Secretary  
Department of Labor and Immigration  
239 Bourke Street  
Melbourne, Vic. 3000  
(PO Box 2817AA  
Melbourne Vic. 3001)  
  
Telephone: 63 0361

Director  
Department of Labor and Immigration  
Australian Government Centre  
Chifley Square  
Sydney, N.S.W. 2000  
  
Telephone: 20343

Director  
Department of Labor and Immigration  
151 Flinders Street  
Melbourne, Vic. 3000  
  
Telephone: 654 3011

Director  
Department of Labor and Immigration  
167 Eagle Street  
Brisbane, Qld. 4000  
(PO Box 1382  
Brisbane, Qld. 4001)  
  
Telephone: 33 7011

Director  
Department of Labor and Immigration  
99 Currie Street  
Adelaide, S.A. 5000  
(PO Box 2299  
Adelaide, S.A. 5001)  
  
Telephone: 51 0441

Director  
Department of Labor and Immigration  
Victoria Centre  
2 St George's Terrace  
Perth, W.A. 6000  
(PO Box R 1273  
Perth, W.A. 6001)  
  
Telephone: 23 0391

Officer-in-Charge  
Department of Labor and Immigration  
CML Building  
University Avenue  
Canberra City, A.C.T. 2600  
(PO Box 399  
Canberra City, A.C.T. 2601)  
  
Telephone: 48 0511

Director  
Department of Labor and Immigration  
Australian Government Centre  
188 Collins Street  
Hobart, Tas. 7000  
(PO Box 585F  
Hobart, Tas. 7001)  
  
Telephone: 20 5011

Officer-in-Charge  
Department of Labor and Immigration  
Mitchell Street  
Darwin, N.T.  
(PO Box 495  
Darwin, N.T. 5794)  
  
Telephone: 89 8911

On matters concerning health, medical and first aid services in employment, contact should be made with the Director-General of Health at the following address:

Director-General of Health  
Department of Health  
(PO Box 100  
Woden, A.C.T. 2602)  
Telephone: Canberra 81 8411

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