Training boost for workplace safety

After protracted negotiations the Department of Education (DoE) has agreed to provide risk management training for design and technology (D&T) staff.

Principals have been advised that they must ensure secondary school D&T staff, including heads of department and heads of learning areas (who may not be D&T trained) undergo essential occupational safety and health (OSH) training in April or May.

It is estimated that 550 teachers will participate in the training.

Succeeding in securing regular training made mandatory is a major step towards a safer workplace for members.

Challenger Institute of Technology will deliver a one day training course which covers two units of competency from the Certificate IV in Work Health and Safety.

All costs involved with the training will be covered by the DoE, central office and not by the school.

Your role as OSH representative

Inspections

One of the legislated functions of an OSH representative is to inspect the workplace for hazards.

There are various types of inspections:

- Regular general inspections to identify hazards
- Specific inspections arising from staff complaints
- Inspections during and following substantial changes to the workplace
- When an accident or incident occurs

Where possible you should agree on the frequency of inspections with the principal or college manager and give notice to the supervisor of the area you intend to inspect. You may conduct these inspections unaccompanied or you may wish to do a joint inspection with management or the area supervisor.

Including the area supervisor can be helpful in more complex areas of the workplace such as science laboratories and workshops.

Where you have not inspected the workplace in the previous 30 days, you may carry out an inspection after giving reasonable notice.

It is advisable to divide your workplace into smaller areas and just inspect one or two areas at a time. This will make it more manageable.

If there is more than one OSH representative, divide the task and then consult on any issues.

Checklists to assist with the inspection process are available from the SSTUWA OSH Manual, the Employee Support Bureau (ESB) intranet site or from the WorkSafe website.

Don’t rely entirely on checklists as every workplace is different and particularly where you are examining whether a system of work is safe or investigating an incident they are not too helpful.

Following an inspection you should bring to the employer’s notice of any issues or hazards that you have identified.

It is advisable to provide this information in writing. However, hazards or potential hazards requiring prompt attention should be raised directly with the employer.

You should also inform the employees that you represent about the findings of your inspection. This might be done at a staff or departmental meeting.

Set up a noticeboard Raise your profile as OSH representative by setting up a noticeboard for safety and health issues. The DoE OSH policy requires the Statement of Intent contained in the policy to be displayed as a minimum.

You can create interest in OSH and change the school culture by keeping the board up to date and changing the articles.

This is easily done as the ESB has support materials that can be accessed on the intranet and articles can be sourced from the Western Teacher, or from the SSTUWA website.

Make sure the names of the current OSH reps are clearly displayed. Maybe include a photograph for those who are new to the workplace.

The Commission for Occupational Safety and Health is the peak consultative forum on OSH in WA.

It is the driving force behind WA's workplace safety laws, policies and programs.

It is a tripartite body made up of employee, employer and government representatives, as well as OSH experts.

The SSTUWA OSH organiser is one of the three employee representatives for Unions WA on this body.

You can access the minutes for this meeting at http://bit.ly/1NGlcqa

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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