# A guide to Risk Control Plans





VICTORIAN WORKCOVER AUTHORITY

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This document should be read in conjunction with OHS Regulations and Codes of Practice. Codes can be obtained from WorkSafe Victoria offices, refer to the back of this document, and regulations can be obtained by visiting www.dms.dpc.vic.gov.au

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#### **Publications and Forms**

Telephone: 9641 1333

Email: www.publications@workcover.vic.gov.au

#### Website: www.workcover.vic.gov.au

#### **Terms of Reference**

The business of the Victorian WorkCover Authority encompasses workplace health and safety, under the brand WorkSafe Victoria, and workers' compensation and rehabilitation referred to as WorkCover.

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# Introduction

### How well do you control risks now?

- Do you know how people could be hurt in your workplace?
- Do you know if these problems are under control?
- Do you know if you are meeting your OHS responsibilities?
- Do you involve everybody who works for you in making the workplace safer?

This guide is about how to control the risks to health and safety in your enterprise.

It will help you to manage occupational health and safety (OHS) and your business more effectively.

# Who is this guide for?

This guide has been written for employers to help them prepare an effective Risk Control Plan. It has been written for senior managers who have the legal responsibility to control workplace risk. You should drive the plan and sign it off. You should encourage and support the involvement of others in the workplace in preparing the Risk Control Plan.

The guide also provides a resource for all those involved in preparing and implementing a Risk Control Plan. In addition to senior managers, this includes other managers and supervisors. The guide is written also for health and safety representatives who have a key role in representing employees in relation to risk control, and for health and safety committee members.

### What is a Risk Control Plan?

- A Risk Control Plan is a plan that sets out how ALL of the risks in the workplace will be controlled.
- A Risk Control Plan will help you meet your legal obligations to identify hazards, assess risks and control risks.

There are regulations for some specific hazards which require that these hazards are identified, the risks assessed and controlled. These regulations are:

- Manual Handling
- Asbestos
- Plant
- Hazardous Substances
- Noise
- Confined Spaces
- Lead
- Dangerous Goods (Storage and Handling)

Codes of Practice give practical guidance on how to identify, assess and control different hazards and risks.

# The role of the inspector

WorkSafe Victoria inspectors enforce health and safety law. To do this, inspectors use tools such as prohibition notices, improvement notices and initiate prosecutions where appropriate. Inspectors can also provide advice on how to introduce planned and effective action to improve workplace health and safety. This is where the Risk Control Plan fits in.

- When inspectors detect breaches of legislation, they will issue improvement notices. If there are immediate risks to health and safety, they will issue prohibition notices.
- If there is no planned program to identify all hazards and to assess and control all risks, an inspector may recommend that you prepare a Risk Control Plan. This should set out the employer's approach and timeframes for achieving effective hazard management. It is your opportunity to take the initiative and show how you will deal with risks in the workplace.
- An inspector will assess the adequacy and timeliness of the Risk Control Plan. If you are not implementing the Risk Control Plan according to the agreed timeframe, inspectors may comprehensively inspect the workplace and compel you to take action to control health and safety risks.
- The inspector will also follow up on the action you have taken in response to any notices issued on a previous visit. If you have not complied with a notice or direction, prosecution will be initiated.

### How to use the guide

- Apply the advice in Section 2 of the guide to prepare a Risk Control Plan.
- Use the template in Section 3 as a format for your Risk Control Plan. You can design your own format if you prefer.
- Follow the advice in Section 4 to maintain your Risk Control Plan.
- Use the checklist at the end of this guide to assess your Risk Control Plan have you covered all of the essential elements? What else should you cover? Have you come up with good control measures?

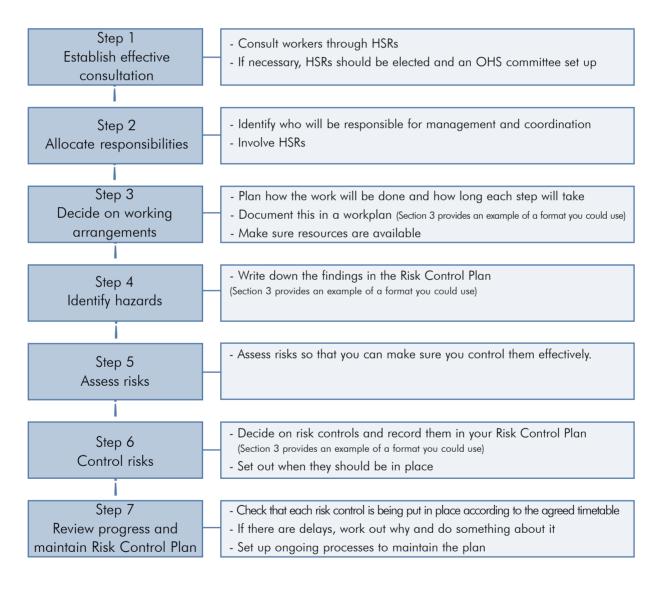


# How do you prepare a Risk Control Plan?

### Step by step

Use the process in the following flow chart to help you prepare the Risk Control Plan. Health and safety representatives (HSRs) should be involved in deciding how you will carry out each step. This could be done with your OHS Committee if you have one.

Make sure that the people involved in all stages of the Risk Control Plan have the skills to do the work. There may be a need for approved HSR training or manager/supervisor training or hazard specific training.



# Step 1 Establish effective consultation

You have a legal obligation to consult with health and safety representatives. If there are no health and safety representatives at your workplace, use Getting Started with Workplace Health and Safety: An Introduction to Workplace Consultation to help you establish effective consultation arrangements.

Health and safety representatives should be involved in preparing and implementing a Risk Control Plan:

- They will be able to represent the workforce so that the workforce can contribute.
- Their knowledge of the workplace is necessary so that you can identify all hazards and assess risks properly, eg shiftwork, manual handling, chemicals, traffic.
- They will have useful ideas about workable and effective control measures.
- The best ideas about how to control risks will probably come from the workforce.
- If people are involved in sorting out problems and the solutions, they are more likely to support the solutions.

# Step 2 Allocate responsibilities

#### Provide sufficient resources and support

Ensure that hazards are identified and risks are assessed and controlled by providing:

- Resources such as people, time, information, administrative support and expert advice;
- Access to the workforce so that they can participate, including paid time off and replacement employees where necessary;
- Commitment and support to make sure that everyone cooperates and is involved; and
- Supporting actions such as training, planning and purchasing new equipment or substances if necessary.

Active support for consultative arrangements is essential for them to work effectively.

#### Organise overall management and coordination

A senior manager should be given responsibility for managing the preparation and implementation of the Risk Control Plan.

#### What is the role of health and safety representatives and the workforce?

Health and safety representatives should be involved in all steps of preparing a Risk Control Plan.

Workers have the right to be consulted over issues that affect their health and safety through their health and safety representatives. They have the right to be informed about the risks of their work. They have essential knowledge and experience that will help to make the Risk Control Plan more complete and effective.

# Step 3 Decide on working arrangements

#### Decide how the Risk Control Plan will be prepared.

The Risk Control Plan could be prepared:

- For the workplace as a whole in smaller workplaces;
- Work area by work area in larger workplaces;
- Project by project for a construction company; or
- Hazard by hazard (eg for manual handling across the enterprise, for plant, hazardous substances and so on).

Separate teams could be formed to prepare different parts of the Risk Control Plan. For example, each work area could set up a team to prepare their section of the Risk Control Plan. Your OHS Committee could be the group that pulls the different sections together into an overall plan.

#### Determine priority areas.

To do this, look at:

- the kinds of hazards involved;
- the number and type of incidents and injuries reported in each area;
- the number of people involved;
- how serious the harm could be;
- any feedback on the effectiveness of your current precautions.

#### Provide training and other resources

To prepare the plan, the people doing the work may need:

- Training
- Expert advice and support (The WorkSafe Victoria guide Getting started with workplace health and safety – an introduction to hazard management, workplace inspections and selecting a health and safety consultant will help you to choose and use a specialist adviser).
- Time
- Administrative support
- Time off the job
- Replacement staff

They will also need information. As well as information and advice from workers and managers, the following sources will be useful.

- The main sources of information you will need are the OHS Regulations and Codes of Practice. These are available from Information Victoria, WorkSafe Victoria offices and the WorkSafe Victoria website (www.workcover.vic.gov.au).
- Other information and guidance material is also available from WorkSafe Victoria and on the WorkSafe Victoria website. The Getting Started with Workplace Health and Safety series gives general information about managing health and safety, eg training, consultation and roles and responsibilities.
- Your industry association and relevant unions may also have information and guidance material for your industry.
- Your WorkCover insurance agent may also be able to help.

#### Set up communication

Everyone in the enterprise should be informed about what is being done to prepare the Risk Control Plan. If they do not know what is happening, they will not be able to contribute their ideas and information.

Different groups in the enterprise will have different needs, for example:

- some workers may not be able to read or speak English very well,
- night shift workers may not get the informal communication that day shift workers receive;
- some workers may have difficulties attending information meetings because they work away from a central workplace.

Your methods for communicating need to take different needs into account. This will mean that different methods should be used for different groups. Health and safety representatives should be involved in deciding how to communicate information within the workplace.

Communication should be open and regular across the enterprise. In particular, managers and health and safety representatives should keep their groups well informed so that they can participate effectively. If you have separate groups working on the plan, make sure that they keep each other informed about their progress. Often, the work of one group will impact on the work of others.

#### Plan how the work will be done

Set out the responsibilities and timeframes for each step. The timeframes must be realistic but ensure that risks are controlled as soon as possible. WorkSafe Victoria expects that the workplan set out in Section 3 of this guide will be completed within three months.



# Case study

#### Preparing a Risk Control Plan

CareCo is a hospital with 12 different work areas. There is a site-wide OHS Committee that is chaired by the CEO and includes health and safety representatives from each designated work group on site. To prepare their Risk Control Plan, the Committee decided to set up four teams to work on each of the major hazards in the hospital:

- Manual handling;
- Plant;
- Noise; and
- Hazardous substances and dangerous goods.

Each team consisted of:

- Two health and safety representatives interested in the hazards or from the work areas where these hazards were more of an issue;
- Two supervisors from relevant work areas;
- The OHS officer, who was a member of each team; and
- A relevant manager, who took responsibility for convening the team, getting resources and making sure that the team's work was completed within the agreed timeframe.

Each team received training on the hazard they were working on. During the training, they started work on the Risk Control Plan. Each team met at least twice more to finalise their plan. Between meetings, team members (management and health and safety representatives) completed risk assessments in their areas, in consultation with relevant workers. At the meetings, team members reported back about the work they had completed and reviewed the finished risk assessments. Immediate risks were addressed as the work was being undertaken. The OHS officer took responsibility for writing up the work of the team and sending it back to team members for them to check and consult with their workmates.

Each team was given a clear timeframe to complete their draft report. The teams reported to the OHS Committee. The Committee reviewed their work and prepared the overall Risk Control Plan, which included other hazards as well.



# Step 4 Identify hazards

A hazard is something with the potential to cause injury, illness or disease. To identify hazards, ask yourself: "what could possibly go wrong here to cause an injury or disease?" Think about hazards that might only happen occasionally, eg during maintenance. Imagine what you would warn a child about if they visited the workplace.

Tools you can use to identify hazards include:

- reports from the workforce;
- workplace inspections;
- research and information from other organisations (eg your industry association, relevant unions, your WorkCover agent, WorkSafe Victoria).
- analysing incident and first aid reports (especially near miss reports);
- information from the suppliers of plant and substances, eg Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS's), especially to identify hazards before they enter the workplace;
- workplace monitoring (eg air monitoring, task observation); or
- information from specialist staff or other parts of the business.

Health and safety representatives must be involved in identifying hazards. Involving the workforce will also help because they are familiar with the workplace and work activities.

Checklists which list common hazards will help you make sure that you have checked all of the major hazards, particularly hidden hazards. Workplace and hazard checklists are available from:

- the WorkSafe Victoria website (www.workcover.vic.gov.au);
- Codes of Practice, eg the Code of Practice Manual Handling;
- Health and Safety: The Best Investment for Small Business (Victorian WorkCover Authority, 1996);
- industry associations and unions.

You will need to review checklists you want to use and include any special items for your enterprise.

Identifying hazards before they enter the workplace is better than waiting until they have caused problems.

You can prevent hazards entering the workplace by thinking about health and safety when:

- purchasing new materials, plant and equipment; and
- designing new workplaces, work processes and activities.

The checklists listed above will help with this.

# **Case study**

#### **Identifying hazards**

Smiley Manufacturing Pty Ltd produces plastic containers using extrusion machines. The Production Manager explained to section managers and health and safety representatives that they needed to identify all hazards in the workplace. They decided to look for hazards in their own work areas first, then compare notes and make a list of the health and safety issues and hazards in the workplace.

They identified that manual handling was the major issue as many compensation claims and first aid reports had been made for back and shoulder pain. The group discussed the requirements of the Manual Handling Regulations and reviewed guidance in the Code of Practice for Manual Handling.

A management representative, the health and safety representative and an employee from each area formed teams and set a date by which they would identify all hazardous manual handling in their area using the Code of Practice. They asked all workers about their worst tasks, and reviewed injury records for each area. They also provided training in using the Code of Practice for the teams.

After all the hazardous manual handling tasks were identified, they met as a group and put together all this information, worked out which were the worst tasks and placed them at the top of the lists for each area. Each team also identified all the hazards involved in using the raw materials and other chemicals, as well as hazards from the machines in the factory including forklifts.

### Step 5 Assess risks

Assessing risks means to look carefully at the hazards you have identified to decide how serious they are. Do you need to do more to make sure that no one is injured or becomes ill?

You assess risks so that you can make sure you control them effectively. Health and safety representatives must be involved in this step to provide accurate information about risk control in the workplace and so that the views of their designated work groups can be taken into account.

The risk from a hazard is a combination of the chance of an incident occurring and what could go wrong – how badly someone could be hurt.

To assess a risk, you must examine all of the factors that affect the risk. You need to look at:

- the number of people exposed to the risk;
- the different types of people who are exposed and their special needs, eg new workers, contractors, members of the public, disabled workers;
- how they are exposed to the risk;
- how often they are exposed;
- how long they are exposed for;
- the combination of hazards they are exposed to;
- how serious the harm could be;
- what the law says about risk control;
- the work processes involved, eg maintenance, cleaning, customer service;
- how well your current precautions work.



REMEMBER: Control risks as you go. Don't wait for all risks to be assessed before you start fixing things.

Different Codes of Practice have checklists and other advice about how to assess the risks of different hazards. For example, the Code of Practice - Manual Handling includes a risk assessment worksheet. This worksheet sets out all of the factors you need to look at when assessing the risks of manual handling.

Assessing risks helps you to make sure that you know what the problem is and to address the most serious problems first. It will help you to deal with the long term problems, as well as the immediate issues.

### **Case study**

#### **Assessing risks**

Steelco Pty Ltd produces metal components for the construction industry. The workplace has many different machines, which are often changed to meet the needs of customers. Each time a machine is changed, the difference this will make to the risks of the machine is assessed first. The health and safety representative for the area, the supervisor and at least one of the operators form a team. This team looks at what effect the proposed change would have on the hazards of the machine, including how the work will change. They use engineers' reports, WorkSafe Victoria's Plant Hazard Checklist and the Risk Assessment Worksheet from the Code of Practice – Manual Handing. From this, they decide whether the change would make it more likely that the machine or the new work process could injure someone.

It is sometimes difficult to make the decision. When this happens, they involve Steelco's OHS Manager and sometimes a specialist consultant on plant safety. If the change would increase the risk, they then work out new control measures and put them in place.



REMEMBER: Control risks as you go. Don't wait for all risks to be assessed before you start fixing things.

# Step 6 Control risks

The reason you identify hazards and assess risks is so that risk control can be more effective. Where you have had an injury, you must control the risk that caused the injury.

- Implement risk controls as soon as possible. While you are waiting for longer term solutions, put interim controls in place
- Implement any 'quick win' controls identified while you assess risks

#### How do you control risks?

To control risks:

#### 1. Eliminate the risk from the workplace.

The most effective method for controlling risks is to eliminate the risk altogether. Health and safety law requires you to try to eliminate risks. The best way to eliminate risks is to make sure that you don't purchase hazardous materials, plant or equipment and to redesign your workplace and work systems to eliminate risks.

- 2. If you cannot eliminate risks, then you must reduce them as far as practicable. Practicable is a legal term that takes into account:
- how severe the risk is;
- what is known about the risk;
- what control measures are available; and
- how much they cost.

The best way is to control a risk at its source by:

- Substituting something with a lower risk (eg making the load lighter and less awkward for a hazardous manual handling task);
- Isolating the source of the risk (eg enclosing a noisy machine within a soundproof booth); or
- Using an engineering control (eg guarding a power press or using a mechanical device to handle a heavy or awkward object).
- 3. If it is not possible to control a risk at its source, use methods that act on people by:
- Changing work practices (eg introducing job rotation to vary repetitive work);
- Providing training (eg training people in particular lifting techniques); or
- Providing protective gear (eg respirators).

These methods are not as effective as risk controls which act on the source of the risk. They should only be used in the short term when it is not practicable to control the risk at its source.

This series of three steps is called *the hierarchy of control*. You should choose control measures from the top of the list wherever practicable, and only use methods that act on people as a last resort.

Health and safety representatives should be involved in deciding on risk control measures. Their knowledge of the workplace will help develop effective control measures and make sure that the control measures will work in practice.

#### Advice about risk controls

As well as your workforce and health and safety representatives, information about and suggestions for different ways to control risks are available from:

- Codes of Practice and other WorkSafe Victoria publications;
- the WorkSafe Victoria website (www.workcover.vic.gov.au);
- the Share solutions data base (www.nohsc.gov.au);
- consultants and other specialist advisers; and
- unions and industry associations.

#### **Testing risk controls**

For some risk controls, you might need to test the control measures before they are permanently put into place. For example, if you decide to redesign a work process, this should be tested before the final arrangements are made. By testing, you will be able to find out if there are any unexpected problems with the new way of doing things. Testing will help to check that the solution doesn't cause any other problems. It will also give the workforce a chance to trial the new work process without the normal day to day work pressures.

#### Training

Many of the new risk control measures will involve training. Training is not a suitable control measure on its own, but training is essential to good risk control. Training gives the workforce the skills and knowledge they need to work with controls and so that they know about the hazards and risks in the workplace. Make sure that everyone in the enterprise knows about the Risk Control Plan and has the skills and knowledge they need to play their part.

#### **Planning actions**

When you have looked at risk control, you will probably find that you have different actions to take. Some of them will be immediate actions; others will take longer to put into place. Your Risk Control Plan will need to include what you will do:

- Immediately;
- In the short term (within a couple of weeks);
- In the medium term (within a couple of months); and
- In the long term (over the next year or so).

To prioritise your actions, think about:

- How severe is the risk?
- How immediate is the risk?
- Who does it affect?
- How easily could it be controlled?
- What other benefits would there be from controlling the risk?

This plan and the priorities should be agreed with your health and safety representatives or by your OHS Committee, if you have one. Record your plan using the format set out in Section 3 or design your own format if you prefer.

Different people might carry out the different jobs in the plan. As the employer, however, you are responsible to make sure that these actions are taken in the agreed timeframe.

# Case study

### Controlling risks of farm chemicals

Farmco is a family-run sheep farm. A husband and wife team work full time on the farm. They employ contract shearers and sometimes casual labourers at busy times of the year.

When they assessed the risks of the farm chemicals they use, they identified that the sheep dips they were using to control lice were often quite poisonous. They used the control measures recommended on the label and the MSDS, but these relied on protective gear. As a result, they assessed that the existing control measures were not adequate. Starting at the top of the hierarchy of controls, they worked out a more effective combination of controls:

#### 1. Eliminate

By improving their fencing, they could prevent their sheep having contact with neighbours' sheep. This would stop them becoming infested with lice, so that they would not need to dip their sheep at all. This would eliminate the risk of the toxic chemicals used to dip sheep from their farm. As well as a health and safety benefit, this has environmental and quality benefits too because their sheep's wool would not have chemical residues in it.

#### 2. Control at source

While their fencing was being improved, the farmers used a less toxic sheep dip. This was only useful as a temporary measure, because they must vary the types of sheep dip they use to prevent lice developing resistance to sheep dips. They also installed a splashguard at the sheep dip to reduce the amount of dip that can be splashed onto the ground and on the person dipping the sheep (an engineering control).

#### 3. Controlling people's actions

Even before the risk assessment, they made sure that there was a break between dipping their different flocks of sheep so that they did not dip sheep constantly for days on end. Both the husband and wife had completed the Chemcert training in using farm chemicals safely. Finally, the protective gear listed on the label is used and maintained properly.

# Step 7 Review progress and maintain the Risk Control Plan

#### **Review progress**

Build in review dates to ensure that you keep on track with your plan. If there are delays, find out why the work is not being done according to schedule. Take action to get the work done in a reasonable timeframe. If you are not doing the work according to your plan and putting the risk controls in place, a WorkSafe Victoria inspector may comprehensively inspect the workplace and compel you to control the risks.

#### **Reviewing the plan**

The control measures you put in place should be reviewed after they have been in place for some time. The control measures might not be as effective as you expected. New, more effective, control measures might now be possible. In any case, you need to check that the control measures are working as planned. The OHS Committee, if you have one, should do the reviews. Health and safety representatives should also be involved.

#### Set up ongoing processes

#### Control before the hazard enters the workplace

The most effective way to control risks is to make sure they don't enter the workplace in the first place. To do this, set up ways to make sure new equipment and materials are assessed for risks before they are purchased and that you only buy safe equipment and materials. If you are going to buy, build or modify the workplace, make sure that in the new workplace risks are controlled effectively. If you design a new work system, make sure that it does not introduce new risks.

#### Maintain risk assessment and control processes

Ensure that as hazards (tasks, work areas, processes) come to your attention, they are placed on the list in the Risk Control Plan, assessed and risk controls are implemented.

# **Risk Control Plan**

Area covered by the Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

Prepared by: Employer \_

Who was consulted in preparing this plan? (work groups, individuals): \_\_\_\_\_

# Workplan

#### Action (see section 2 of the guide)

Put effective consultation arrangements in place

- HSRs elected and trained
- OHS Committee established

Identify who is responsible for different jobs in developing the RCP, particularly overall

management and coordination

Set up working arrangements, namely:

- How the plan will be prepared (eg by work area or by hazard)
- Identify priority hazards and priority work areas
- Provide training and other resources
- Communication

Decide a plan of action for risk control that includes timetables for:

- Identifying specific hazards;
- Assessing risks;
- Introducing risk controls as soon as possible.
- Reviewing progress with the Risk Control Plan

#### Signed by:

Senior responsible manager \_\_\_\_

Health and safety representative \_\_\_\_

Date prepared: \_\_\_\_\_

Health and safety representative \_\_\_\_\_

Timeline	Responsibility	Status

# **Risk Control Actions**

Hazo whei exac	ards identified (list re and what they are tly)	Risk controls already in place	Is th a ris	nere sk?	Short-term actions taken to control the risk
No.	What and where is it?		Yes	No	

Date for short-term actions to be completed	What other control measures are needed? (Use the hierarchy of control to decide on control measures) (see p 12 of the guide)	Date for longer-term actions to be completed	Who is responsible for making sure it is done?
 1		1	

# **Action Table**

Hazard Number	What has to be done to control the risks? (from Risk control actions)	Who will do it?	How will they do it?
Short term			
Reviewed by:	·		
Medium term			
Reviewed by:			
Long term:			
Reviewed by:			

Resources needed to do it	Who is responsible for making sure it is done?	By when?	Review date
Progress review date (within t	wo weeks):		
Progress review date (within t	hree months):		
Progress review date: (within	12 months):	1	<u></u>

# How effective is your Risk Control Plan?

Does your Risk Control Plan have the following features?	Νο	Yes
Have health and safety representatives been involved in preparing the Risk Control Plan?		
Are the roles and responsibilities for preparing the Risk Control Plan clear?		
Are the relevant people meeting their responsibilities?		
Has the employer signed off the plan?		
Has the employer provided sufficient resources to implement the plan?		
Have OHS experts and resources been available when necessary in preparing the plan?		
Have you checked the legal requirements for how to identify, assess and control risks in your enterprise?		
Has everyone in the enterprise been informed about the Risk Control Plan?		
Have all of the hazards in the workplace been identified and listed in the Risk Control Plan?		
Are new plant, substances and processes examined to stop new hazards pefore they enter the workplace?		
Have all of the factors that will affect the risks been considered in assessing risks?		
Have you taken immediate steps to control risks?		
Do your control measures focus on controlling hazards at their source?		
Do the control measures in the Risk Control Plan reduce risk as far as practicable?		
Do the control measures in the Risk Control Plan meet the standards set by egal requirements?		
Do the control measures in the Risk Control Plan comply with or exceed recognized standards in your industry?		
Does your plan specify short, medium and long term actions?		
Have you provided adequate information, instruction and training so that he Risk Control Plan can be put into practice?		
Are the roles and responsibilities for making the Risk Control Plan work clear and followed?		
Are the timeframes in the Risk Control Plan monitored and any problems sorted out?		
Does the Risk Control Plan include a review of the effectiveness of risk controls?		
Have you set up ongoing processes to maintain the plan?		

# WorkSafe Victoria Offices

### WorkSafe Victoria

WorkSafe Victoria offers a complete range of health and safety services:

- emergency response
- advice, information and education
- inspections
- licensing and certification
- publications.

For further assistance and information, contact any of the WorkSafe Victoria offices listed below.

#### **Head office**

Victorian WorkCover Authority 24th Floor 222 Exhibition Street Melbourne Victoria 3000

GPO Box 4306 Melbourne Victoria 3001

Phone	9641	1555
Fax	9641	1222
Toll-free	1800	136 089

#### **Local offices**

Ballarat	5337 1400
Bendigo	5443 8866
Dandenong	8792 9000
Geelong	5223 2300
Melbourne	9628 8115
Mildura	5021 4001
Mulgrave	9565 9444
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Warrnambool	5562 5600

#### **Publications**

Phone	9641	1333
Fax	9641	1330

#### Website

www.workcover.vic.gov.au

#### Email

info@workcover.vic.gov.au

#### WorkCover Advisory Service

24th Floor 222 Exhibition Street Melbourne Victoria 3000

Phone	9641	1555
Fax	9641	1222
Toll-free	1800	136 089

