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A WHS Consultation Review for Current Work Situations

Prior to the impact that the virus called SARS-CoV-2* has had on workplace operations and conditions, you probably had suitable arrangements and procedures in place for consulting with workers and taking any necessary steps to keep them safe and healthy. But along came the virus that has a potential of causing a disease called COVID-19*. It seems there are very few organisations that have not had to change their staffing arrangements, standing staff down, or having staff work at home either 5 days a week or a mix of time in the office and the rest at home.

The WHS requirement to consult with workers about workplace health and safety matters obviously continues even if the worker now works from home. From what we hear, and read, it seems that many at-home-workers are looking forward to getting back to the good old days of not working-at-home because working-at-home is driving them crazy and they miss the interaction with other workers.

Also, at-home-workers are often working in situations that have ergonomic deficiencies. A chiropractor we know has already discovered this because of an increase in clients who come to him deal with the physical repercussions they experience from working-at-home in poor ergonomic situations.

Section 49 of the WHS Act sets out when you must consult workers and the Code of Practice, *Work Health and Safety Consultation, Cooperation and Coordination*, advises us that;

“The WHS Act identifies specific matters that trigger the requirement for consultation. As a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) you must consult with workers when:

- *identifying hazards and assessing risks to health and safety arising from the work carried out or to be carried out*
- *making decisions about ways to eliminate or minimise those risks*
- *making decisions about the adequacy of facilities for the welfare of workers*
- *proposing changes that may affect the health or safety of your workers,*

- *making decisions about procedures for consulting with workers; resolving health or safety issues at the workplace; monitoring health of your workers; monitoring the conditions at the workplace under your management or control and providing information and training for your workers.*

However, it may be useful to also consult workers about matters not listed above.

Requirements for consultation in the WHS Regulation are listed in Appendix E.

Regular consultation is better than consulting only as issues arise on a case-by-case basis because it allows you to identify and fix potential problems early.”

Obviously the need to deal with the virus risk and the lockdown restrictions will have triggered a number of the consultation bullet points listed above that impact your workers. You may find it beneficial to consider the above bullet points and review the resilience and effectiveness of your consultation processes and procedures during this time and make improvements if needed.

Reference

* The World Health Organisation (WHO) has a clear and simple explanation of the names used for the virus and the disease on their website [HERE](#).

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