

6 May 2008

MEDIA RELEASE

OHS training hit and miss for white collar workers, new research finds

The chance of receiving an Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) induction is hit and miss for on-hire employees entering white collar roles, new research has found.

The Workplace Pulse Quarterly survey, conducted by WorkPro, an e-learning and information management system, has found an overwhelming 98 per cent of on-hire clerical employees (also known as clerical 'temps') feel workplace safety is an important issue for office-based jobs.

Despite this, employers appear to be taking an ad hoc approach to safety training. Only one in three (33%) survey respondents say they are always provided with a safety induction, 28 per cent will receive one most times, while it is an occasional occurrence for 19 per cent of survey respondents.

"The idea of white collar workers being free from workplace injury has clearly had its day, and most employers are now acknowledging their broad OHS obligations. However, they are still not ticking all the boxes when it comes to delivering the required office safety message from the word go," WorkPro Business Manager, Ms Tania Evans, said.

The most common elements being covered in white collar safety inductions by employers are: the identification of emergency exits (80%), evacuation procedures (75%) and the location of a first aid kit (74%).

However, over half (52%) of respondents say their employers are still failing to check that their workstations are ergonomically correct - one of the major causes of spinal and neck injury for office-based workers - while over a third (37%) felt they are often not told about possible workplace hazards.

Ms Evans said that employers who do not meet proper safety training requirements as mandated by workplace laws, leave their business and employees open to unnecessary risk.

"What's worrying is that almost one third (32%) of survey respondents indicated they have never engaged in temp work before. This means employers must not assume those commencing a new role will be fully aware of their OHS rights, responsibilities and procedures as a 'temp' worker.

"Particularly for on-hire employers, who have very clear legal responsibility, along with host employers, for the workplace safety of temp employees, the prospect of hefty fines upon injury is very real. Pre-placement OHS system and risk assessments, as well as comprehensive pre-work inductions, should be offered without question for all roles - not just where machinery is present, such as in blue-collar work," she said.

The research, conducted between February and March 2008, surveyed 388 on-hire (temp) office/ clerical workers from recruitment agencies across Australia, to gain an understanding of their OHS training experiences between various roles.

Further findings from the research suggest over one in five (23%) on-hire or 'temporary' employees don't have a full understanding of who is legally responsible for their safety at work. They mistakenly identified only one party, either their host employer (19%) or on-hire employer (4%), as being solely responsible for their workplace safety. In fact, both, the host employer and on-hire firm or 'temp' agency share legal responsibility, as identified by a well-informed 69 per cent of respondents.

However, they do feel empowered regarding their own safety. Almost all (97%) of employees feel they would either be likely or very likely to report a safety hazard to a manager, however, almost one third of respondents (28%) reported 'not knowing who to approach' as the main reason for them not to report a workplace safety hazard. A further 10 per cent feel they would be reluctant to raise a safety issue if they suspect it wouldn't be acted upon.

"Providing relevant and meaningful safety information to employees before work starts is critical and could mean the difference between checking that employees' chairs or computer screens can be adjusted to a suitable height or securing trip hazards around the office, versus facing hefty fines or reputational damage later," Ms Evans concluded.

-Ends-

About WorkPro:

WorkPro is an online e-learning and information management solution, specialising in the delivery of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) induction training.

As the result of years of market research within the recruitment industry, it represents industry best practice in the mitigation of workplace risk and sets a standard for the delivery of mandatory workplace training information for employees and contractors (as well as on-hire employees or 'temps') in one simple format.

WorkPro combines the delivery of tailored and standard learning modules, with the ability to centrally store critical employment information for future-proofing, and verify employees' personal, employment and career-related information, such as residency status or prior learning assessments- instantly, and all within one single, centralised system. It is the brainchild of workplace relations and recruitment industry professionals who have over seventy years of combined recruitment experience.

Media Contacts:

Danielle Murdolo
Media Consultant, Buchan
03 9866 4722 or 0403 688 980
dmurdolo@bcg.com.au

Tania Evans
Business Manager, WorkPro
03 9864 6017 or 0415 294 183
tevens@rsagroup.com.au