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Increased focus on OHS leads to industry solution

While many in the recruitment and on-hire industry question the fairness and practicality of Australian OHS laws that hold on-hire agencies responsible for the health and safety of employees working on third party premises, the reality is, companies who do not take their OHS obligations seriously are at real risk of prosecution.

Tania Evans, Business Manager of WorkPro – an online induction solution for the recruitment and on-hire industry- looks at the problem for labour providers.

Australian safety regulators are keeping a close eye on the industry, as evidenced by a recent Victorian OHS case, where it was found an on-hire worker who was injured on a host employer site when a forklift overturned, did not hold a certificate of competency to operate the machine. Nor had the worker been provided with a health and safety manual or briefed on what tasks his qualifications limited him to.

Prosecutors turned their attention to the Victorian on-hire company responsible for the candidate's safety, fining it \$10,000 for ignoring its OHS duties to the on-hire worker, failing to provide adequate information, instruction and training prior to engagement in the work.

And in another instance in NSW, an on-hire firm was found guilty of a similar breach. Significantly, the presiding judge argued that the seriousness of the offence was increased by the on-hire employer failing its obligations, despite the availability of relatively simple measures that would have reduced the risk - including the implementation of a preliminary OHS induction program.

While it's not always possible to control risk without full time on-site representation, there are several practical steps you can take to minimise the risks. And in the eyes of the law, there is simply no excuse for failing to minimise a candidate's workplace risk.

The reality is, when an OHS incident ends up in court, prosecutors will inevitably focus on whether an on-hire employee had been given a general OHS induction from the agency before commencing work, and whether that induction was documented, and included an assessment.

WorkPro is the first centralised online induction solution developed specifically for the on-hire industry to address these critical questions. It streamlines the safety compliance process for both employers and candidates, by creating, storing, sharing and managing personal information and induction assessment results on employees, candidates and contractors, in a simple, centralised, on-line system.

WorkPro is an initiative of Risk Solutions Australia Ltd - it is operated in collaboration with, and supported by, the industry's peak body, the Recruitment and Consulting Services Association.

Before candidates commence work in a new job it is a legal requirement for employers and principal contractors to provide training and instruction in a range of areas prior to the candidate's engagement in work.

By enabling candidates to register online and complete their assigned training modules, their assessment score is then permanently stored on a centralised database allowing the recruiter instant access to their information and results, before they are engaged in a contract.

As a portable system, their records can be made available from one agency to the next via the candidate's ID/ PIN code.

The induction modules have been developed to meet WorkSafe legislative requirements, as well as industry-specific needs, and job-specific roles. These include, white collar, blue collar, hospitality, retail or nursing sectors, allowing recruitment agencies to semi-customise the candidate's induction training.

These modules include:

- On-Hired Employment Safety (OHS) - an introduction to on-hired employment, also known as 'temping' or labour hire'
- Office Worker Safety - provides the candidate with an overview of office safety procedures and requirements;
- Manufacturing Worker Safety - outlines the risks and controls associated with manufacturing;
- Store Worker Safety - overview of storage and manual order picking risks and controls;
- Call Centre Worker Safety - call centre risks and controls and office safety procedures and requirements;
- Nursing Worker Safety - broad overview of OHS in nursing, including a definition of the most common risks and hazards in nursing and how to prevent these risks;
- Retail Worker Safety - general introduction to safety for retail workers;
- Hospitality Worker Safety - general overview of the risks and hazards involved in hospitality work and general safety procedures;
- Forklift Safety Operator - elements of safe forklift operations, not designed as formal training to gain a forklift licence;
- Prevention of Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying - examines workplace discrimination, harassment and bullying, and how to prevent it;
- Safety & Equality in OHS - combining on-hired employee safety and discrimination, bullying and harassment information, and the basis of further induction;
- Working Alone - information for employees regularly working alone and in an unfamiliar environment.

Now is time for the on-hire industry to demonstrate that we, as an industry, are taking induction training seriously. Training candidates in how to work safely and fairly, including their rights and obligations, demonstrates a commitment to best practice which will benefit the entire industry.

For more information about WorkPro, visit www.workpro.com.au

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