

Engaging an occupational hygienist

This fact sheet provides persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) information on engaging an **occupational hygienist**.

What does an occupational hygienist do?

An occupational hygienist (sometimes also known as an industrial hygienist) is a professional who uses science and engineering principles to anticipate, recognise, evaluate, and recommend controls for health hazards in the workplace to protect workers and help you comply with work health and safety (WHS) laws. They play a key role in preventing workplace illnesses by identifying hazards early and recommending evidence-based solutions to eliminate or minimise risk.

Hazards an occupational hygienist may focus on in your workplace include:

- **chemical** hazards (such as dusts, vapours, fumes, mists and gases)
- **physical** hazards (such as noise, vibrations, radiation), and
- **biological** hazards (such as mould).

To get the most value from engaging an occupational hygienist, it is best to involve them early in your risk management process. Occupational hygienists can help identify hazards, assess exposure risks, and recommend effective control strategies tailored to your workplace. They can also evaluate the effectiveness of any current controls you have in place. Read the fact sheet: [risk assessments for airborne contaminants](#) for more information. For information on WHS risk assessments more generally, see the [Safe Work Australia website](#).

What can you expect from an occupational hygienist?

Gathering information

Before coming to your workplace, an occupational hygienist will ask you questions about the types of work you do, work processes, known hazards (including any chemicals used), and what WHS control measures you currently have in place. Talking to your workers will help you identify any concerns and how work processes could be improved to reduce risk.

Once they have the basic information, a site visit will be organised, where they may conduct testing and gather any additional information. An occupational hygienist can use a number of ways to gather information about hazards in your workplace. This could include:

- a **walkthrough** survey of your workplace
- asking you and your workers **questions about your work processes**
- reading **safety data sheets** relevant to materials that contain or release hazardous substances
- inspecting **control measures** such as ventilation, personal hygiene facilities and respiratory protective equipment
- conducting **air monitoring** (for example, using personal samplers to measure levels of airborne contaminants)
- conducting **noise monitoring**
- **fit testing** workers personal protective equipment (PPE)
- performing any other **tests** as required.

Some tests may require your workers to wear a monitor. It may help if you explain to your workers why the occupational hygienist is there and the purpose of the testing.

Providing results and advice

Following testing and data collection, an occupational hygienist will conduct detailed analysis to assess hazards and form any recommendations to reduce the risk to health and safety in your workplace. They will provide you with a report that documents the results of any monitoring undertaken and an assessment of their findings. A report from an occupational hygienist should clearly detail:

- what hazards were identified
- what tasks and processes were analysed
- what tests were done, and why
- how data and samples were taken and tested
- how and where samples were analysed
- the results of all monitoring conducted, with an explanation of what the results mean in the context of health risks and compliance
- whether any measured exposures exceed [workplace exposure limits](#) or other relevant guidelines, and
- any recommendations for health and safety improvements.

The advice should be clear, and explain the methods, results, and tools used in a way that others can understand or repeat the process. You should be provided with recommendations on any new or changed control measures that you should consider including suggested timeframes for implementation.

What should I do with advice from an occupational hygienist?

You must keep records of air monitoring for at least 30 years. You must also make sure that your workers can access these records.

As the person responsible for ensuring the health and safety of workers, it is up to you as the PCBU to implement any recommendations made by an occupational hygienist. Any new or modified control measures you put into operation may require changes to the way work is carried out, for example, working with new or modified equipment or processes, new or different chemicals or new personal protective equipment. In these situations, control measures should be supported with:

- **work procedures** (document the task, associated hazards, and how the task should be performed to minimise risk)
- **training, instruction and information** (must be provided in a form that can be understood by all workers)
- **supervision**, and
- **maintenance** (you may need to schedule routine checks and maintenance).

When introducing new control measures, you must also consider if any new or different risks are introduced that also need to be controlled. You will also need to review the effectiveness of the implemented control measures to check they are working as intended.

How do I find an occupational hygienist?

Visit the **Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists** website (www.aioh.org.au) to find a list of occupational hygienists, including certified occupational hygienists who may be able to help in your workplace.

Further information

For further information see the Safe Work Australia website www.swa.gov.au.