

# Championing work health and safety through supply chains

## Challenges and opportunities

with Vicki Middleton and Dr Rob Vertessy, Bureau of Meteorology

§ (Music Playing) §

### **Michelle Baxter:**

Hello. I'm Michelle Baxter. I'm the Chief Executive Officer of Safe Work Australia and I'd like to thank you all today for joining us, both our in-theatre audience and those joining us online.

Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land upon which we are meeting, the Ngunnawal people. I acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and to this region.

This presentation forms part of the suite of Virtual Seminars that we are holding throughout Safe Work Australia Month in support of the important goals of the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022.

The seminars are showcasing the latest thinking, innovation, research and development in work health and safety. By sharing ideas, experiences, skills and knowledge together we look to achieve the Australian Strategy vision of healthy, safe and productive working lives.

Today's discussion explores two challenging and intersection action areas from the Australian strategy. They are:

- 'healthy and safe by design'; and
- 'safety throughout the supply chain'.

The concept of healthy and safe by design means that hazards and risks are eliminated or minimised in the early stage of designing the places we work in, the things we use for work and how we carry out our work. While good work design leads to a reduction in workplace deaths, injuries and illnesses, there are additional long term benefits to business with more efficient work processes and satisfied and engaged workers. However, for a workplace to be genuinely healthy and safe by design, its leaders must actively tackle challenges that undermine safety at the source and seek opportunities to improve the health and safety of their own workers and other people who may be affected by that work.

Good workplace leaders don't just look out for their workers in their immediate line of sight. They think about what they can do for workers in the supply chains and networks that support their business. Underpinning this are legal obligations. Work health and safety laws require business owners to, so far as is reasonably practicable, protect their own workers and others who may be affected by their work and this can include workers in their supply chains.

The Australian Government is, quite reasonably, seen by the private sector, the community and by our regional neighbours as responsible for modelling good work health and safety practice both in Australia and overseas. The Australian Government in September 2014 signed the G20 Labour and Employment Ministerial Declaration on safer and healthier workplaces which in part focuses on supply chains.

Today, we will hear how despite working in some of the most demanding environments - the Bureau of Meteorology meets the challenge of blending good work design with the practical aspects of construction, transport, installation, ongoing maintenance and the intricacies of local geography and culture.

Our speakers will discuss how implementing good work design and practice through their supply chains locally and overseas really is possible, how it makes good business sense, how it's led to positive, long term, sustainable work health and safety outcomes for the Bureau. So I'm delighted that Dr Rob Vertessy and Miss Vicki Middleton from the Bureau of Meteorology today will discuss *Championing work health and safety through the supply chains: Challenges and opportunities*.

Dr Rob Vertessy has been CEO for the Bureau of Meteorology for the past three years. Before that Rob has spent 20 years of his career as a researcher and academic in CSIRO specialising in catchment hydrology. Rob is also Australia's permanent representative to the World Meteorological Organization and in 2013 he was elected a fellow of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering.

Our second speaker is Miss Vicki Middleton. Vicki oversees the Bureau's corporate division and is responsible for the agency's corporate functions including strategic planning, finance, corporate, real estate, human resources, corporate communication, library and legal services. Vicki is a highly experienced senior public servant with extensive government and private sector management experience.

And last but not least let me introduce you today to our Facilitator, the internationally renowned Professor David Caple, who has over 30 years' experience as a work health and safety consultant. David is an Adjunct Professor at the Centre for Ergonomics and Human Factors at Latrobe University in Melbourne and Senior Research Fellow from the Federation University in Ballarat. Please join me in welcoming our speakers. I'll now hand over to David to start today's discussion. Thank you David.

(Audience Applause)

**David Caple:**

Thank you Michelle and thank you to all of you for coming along and welcome to Rob and Vicki. It's my pleasure to facilitate this interview today about supply chains within the context of the work from the Bureau of Meteorology. So I think I'd like to start with Vicki. If you could maybe share with the audience a little bit about what the Bureau's services and programs are? I think we all are familiar with what we see on the television about what the Bureau provides as a service to our community. But I know from your website it's a lot more complex than that.

**Vicki Middleton:**

It is. I think you would have seen from the images that are scrolling through behind us the Bureau really is quite an extraordinary workplace. We're very distributed. We have staff in over 50 locations across Australia, in Antarctica, in our external territories. Every year, we collect billions of observations. We issue literally half a million public weather forecasts. In addition to that, we provide about half a million specific forecasts to support the aviation industry. We do specific work with Defence.

So much of what we do is actually about providing the information that's absolutely essential for our private sector and for all parts of our economy to make the decisions they need to make every day about whether to start a construction project, open another mine right to whether or not it's worth hanging out the washing in the morning before you head to work. So we're an incredibly distributed organisation. The volume of what we do is phenomenal. It's quite mind blowing. So every year about 53 billion hits happen on our website with people checking in for actual observational information about "What's the temperature right now?" right through to the latest warnings and information.

One of the areas that most people would be aware of what the Bureau does is in our work to support our emergency services agencies. So I'm sure all of you saw the smoke plume coming through. Absolutely critical information that's got to be timely to assist our emergency service operations in knowing when's the best time to respond, where to deploy emergency services crews, how much time they've got to potentially evacuate people from floods. So the work we do is distributed. There's virtually no location in Australia where the Bureau doesn't have a relationship or where we don't touch people on the ground right through to every single international flight every single day that lands in Australia relies on a forecast from the Bureau. So we're a very diverse organisation.

**David Caple:**

You certainly are. And Rob, being the CEO of such a big organisation with huge responsibilities, what are the sort of things that you do and you value as a leader to ensure that this organisation maintains what we know as a high level of health and safety performance?

**Rob Vertessy:**

Look I think three things. The first is having to understand that complex business that Vicki's spoken to. I don't think you can really practise good safety in an organisation unless you understand what it is that your people are doing. So I'm at pains and I exhort my executives likewise to get around the organisation, actually understand the functions, to meet the people and to show a genuine authentic interest in what they're actually doing including the safety dimensions of what they do.

So understanding the business is the first thing.

The second thing is active monitoring of the safety posture of the organisation. Now they might be routine reports that are coming through to the executive or it might be monitoring our incident reporting system in real time. It's really showing an active interest in what is going on at any one time.

And the third really is about being action-oriented that when issues do arise are really setting the tone and the pace of change that is required to actually demonstrate the commitment, not just to articulate it but to demonstrate it that we are about finding solutions in a very timely and effective manner to each and every safety issue as it arises.

**David Caple:**

And I suppose in the context of this business model and that focus we're today really wanting to explore supply chains and you obviously are around the world. You deal with a lot of contractors. You deal with a lot of other governments. Maybe you would like to give us an example of one of the supply chains where health and safety is part of your business?

**Rob Vertessy:**

Look I think a good one is the work that we do on behalf of DFAT throughout the Pacific - throughout the South-West Pacific. So there we're engaged with about a dozen Pacific Island countries to enhance their preparedness for climate change and to live with climate variability. So we've got a large program where we're helping to build capacity and that requires that we actually work in the field in other countries, often within the context of other agencies' operating procedures. It might be a foreign met service or it might be an airport or it might be a defence installation and we have not only collaborators over there but also contractors that we engage. There might be local staff etc. So as you can see there that's a complex supply chain. There's a lot of opportunity for role confusion, duck shoving if something goes wrong as well. So getting clear clarity – role clarity is really important in those situations.

**David Caple:**

So Vicki with those procedures, I presume you've developed a work health and safety system to integrate that into your business model. But what have been some of the challenges to utilise a systematic approach at an international level to deal with the contractors, the subcontractors as well as your own staff?

**Vicki Middleton:**

I think it actually starts with our relationship with DFAT or Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and that is we have an MOU with them. We're very explicit in that MOU that we see workplace health and safety as one of their key deliverables of our contract with them to deliver the project in the South Pacific. In many cases we're a supplier. So we supply equipment, we train local people in how to install that, how to operate it and how to work with it.

I guess for us one of the key things has been when we are engaging staff locally making sure that we're providing them with briefings about safety and what the requirement is and what we're trying to achieve each day when we're on site before they get on site. Each of our locally engaged staff it is a requirement of our contract with the individual or with the company that's supplying them that they come with personal protective equipment. Obviously, that doesn't always happen unfortunately. So we always as part of our pre-deployment planning make sure we plan for taking extra equipment so that if it's required we do provide that.

I think one of the other things for us is knowing that for our staff that are out on the ground, one they've had very good training and planning before they go themselves and they're complying with all of our workplace health and safety policies and procedures for the task they're performing as if they were performing them at a Bureau of Met site in Australia. So it doesn't matter which location you're in. We support you to be doing things exactly the same way as you would here but making sure that they're sharing that information with their locally engaged staff. But also knowing that they have the backup of the Bureau should a locally engaged staff member turn up without the right boots or without a vis vest or without a helmet to actually say "We can supply you with that equipment" or if for some reason we're unable to that they're just not allowed to work on site that day.

So it's about making sure we continue to have that defence in depth going right through the organisation so everyone's backed up. We have contingency plans in place and really it's about trying to leave that workplace health and safety culture behind when we go so that people are better equipped when they are looking after the equipment we leave behind that they have the capability to do that in a safe way.

**David Caple:**

So Rob whilst it's a very good journey that you've been on, has there been any of these that has given you an "aha" moment, that you thought you had it right but I didn't expect this to go on?

**Rob Vertessy:**

Like all organisations we've got – we've had blind spots and we probably continue to have them. The "aha" moment for us was really – it wasn't actually as part of this DFAT engagement. It was part of a long-standing research collaboration that we have had with Los Alamos National Laboratories in the United States where for them we deploy a lot of quite sophisticated meteorological monitoring equipment in exotic places around the world like Brazil and Portugal even. And this particular example I'd like to draw attention to was in Manus Island and it – the "aha" moment began with a seemingly innocuous incident report that came to our executive. A chap bruised his foot during an equipment installation process on Manus Island and we started deconstructing the event to see what had actually happened.

And what we exposed in that case was rather lax pre-mission planning that really resulted in the team that went on mission being rather unprepared for the particular work method that had to be executed on that day which was the erection of a satellite reception system. It turned out they didn't have the appropriate equipment. They jerry-rigged something with a car jack. Sure enough that failed. Someone's foot got injured in the process. Could have been severed. It could have been rather serious. And so that was a bit of a wake-up call to us because we realised that we didn't have the appropriate procedures in place to ensure that the mission was properly planned.

So we began by bringing in the project manager, not a person that was in the field but rather responsible for things back home just to better understand the process, not to admonish the person but simply to understand the processes and it was clear that we actually were deficient in terms of what we should have in place. So we halted all further work on the project and that caused a lot of distress because the client who was paying for our services expected us to maintain milestones and the like. But until we got a letter of assurance from the project manager that certain interim procedures would be put in place work was halted.

We did get those interim procedures put in place and eventually they became the blueprint for systematising proper procedures. And they are now in operation and no one goes overseas now without having the appropriate risk assessments and the safe work procedures and the work method statements and the like all in place. So a little incident, a wake-up call. Great outcome in the end in that it really helped us to harden up our procedures.

**David Caple:**

So Vicki just in that context, how do you embed health and safety into such a complex model and maybe give us some examples of where you need to lift the bar?

**Vicki Middleton:**

Look, I think the key thing for us is you can have as much documentation as is best practice but ultimately it still comes down to what's your posture and what's your attitude and how do you enforce that and encourage the best behaviour in the contractors that you're working with? And I think one of the key things for us is part of our system is to make sure when we're procuring locally engaged contractors what we actually do is we have as part of our criteria for going out and procuring contractors that workplace health and safety is a key part of that.

For us, value for money is largely about the successful tenderer also being able to demonstrate how they'll comply with our workplace health and safety requirements. Sometimes there's a bit of a challenge there because if you're working in another country they'll have their own workplace health and safety requirements. So our posture is always we'll do both. So you can do ours and we'll do yours as well to try and reduce the impact of that getting in the way and, as Rob mentioned, the risk of duck shoving.

I think one of the other things for us is it's about making sure you're doing that pre-planning and the work before you actually have people on the ground to make sure that you're applying your system effectively. I think one of the other things is that as part of how we've developed our system it's been a really strong engagement process with all the staff in the Bureau. So we work with some incredibly common challenges and hazards as most organisations would. We do a lot of manual lifting.

We're a 24/7 organisation and we can't control the weather. Despite what everyone thinks we can do, we can't. And in that, that means events will brew up and it means that sometimes we will have staff in quite sustained and prolonged periods of high intensity work because we're dealing with flood or cyclone or fire events over multiple jurisdictions at once. So fatigue is something we have to really closely manage in our organisation.

I think one of the other things for us as well is our staff travel huge distances. We've got thousands of sites across the country that have equipment on them and those all need to be maintained and calibrated to make sure that the information we're relying on to produce forecasts is accurate. So for us when we have equipment in remote locations and we're sending out subcontractors to go out and do electrical work we want to make sure that they're complying with our fatigue policies, our driving policies, our electrical requirements as part of doing that and we always make sure we have someone from the Bureau to the greatest extent practicable supervising that process so we have the assurance that what needs to be done is as safe as if we were doing it ourselves.

So yes going through the process of subcontracting doesn't have us sort of say "Oh well that's the contractor's problem." We actually see that contractor as now joining the Bureau family and we want to make sure they have access to everyone – exactly the same information that a Bureau employee would have if they were going out to do that same job.

**David Caple:**

So Rob many of these are in other parts of the world. You've mentioned the Pacific and Brazil and Portugal and Antarctica. Each of those has their own cultures, their own way of looking at risk.

**Rob Vertessy:**

Yep.

**David Caple:**

How does that present a challenge and an opportunity I suppose for your staff to have that consistency that Vicki's talking about?

**Rob Vertessy:**

Yeah. Well look, I think it begins with a very clear message to our people and that is that no matter where you are, no matter what you're doing, no matter who you're doing it for and doing it with, it's your responsibility to ensure that you apply the same level of vigilance and diligence in work health and safety that you do if you were doing it in your office or your own field station. That's the first part of it.

The second part which is more – a little more nuanced is making that clear to the people that you're working with as well. As Vicki said often they will have their own requirements but that doesn't reduce the need for us to apply our standards as well. So it's not this **or** that. It's both. So getting that message very, very clear not only to our own staff but to the people that we're working with is the beginning of the story.

**Vicki Middleton:**

I think the other thing I'd add to that too is that for our staff that are out working with locally engaged staff in another country there are often challenges about "Oh well we've just got to get this job done and we've got to go somewhere else tomorrow." It's our people having the confidence to say "No, this isn't good enough. We're not happy with how this is proceeding. We're going to stop. We're going to make sure we get the equipment we need and if that means we're going to be doing this tomorrow, the next day or next week then we will do that." And for our people who are in the field knowing that when they do have to make those decisions and enforce them that they will be backed up right through the food chain. So for us it's really important that people are empowered to make the right decision, that reinforces good workplace health and safety practice rather than just doing what might be easiest on the day.

**David Caple:**

And I understand communication must be a challenge in a global business like this. So are there any examples that you've had of how you communicate on what they're doing well and safety alerts or other opportunities to just underpin your commitment to this area?

**Rob Vertessy:**

Look there are a few things. Often there's – well always of course there is a pre-deployment briefing. Then there are progress reports during the deployment and then finally debriefs at the end of the process. At home of course we have a significant communications arsenal that we apply to this. So we have things like safety bulletins going out. Whenever a particular issue comes up we'll be sure to draw attention to it within the organisation. We have regular events like most organisations would. I think we have a monthly...

**Vicki Middleton:**

Yep.

**Rob Vertessy:**

...a monthly feature on a particular issue and then an annual event where we might pick a couple of themes out and we'll explore them in depth. I think really the essence of really good safety culture in an organisation is a lot of talking and engagement, getting it high in people's minds and keep coming back to it all the time so that it's never forgotten I think is the key.

**Vicki Middleton:**

Yeah. I think to add to that we also have an annual workplace health and safety award program within the Bureau where not only do we as the executive go and identify things that we think have been a great success and showcase those, we actually have a process where staff can nominate other members of staff who they think are particularly good workplace health and safety champions or have come up with innovation.

I think one of the other things that's just been fantastic from our workplace health and safety team is the degree of engagement they get in developing every one of our policies and procedures. So we have 56 different policies and procedures and they cover everything from safe driving to working with hydrogen to working with electricity to making sure your workstation is set up correctly. So we cover all the bases. But each one of those has been developed through a really quite structured consultation process. So our workplace health and safety team do what I call the "conformance" side of it, looking at what's best practice and how we build that. But they actually go through two structured rounds of consultation with the staff that need to implement the policy and procedure not only to say "Does this sound right?" but to actually say "Is there anything we've got in this policy or procedure that might put you in harm's way with another hazard that we haven't thought of?"

So it's all designed to make it as practical as possible so that by the time that policy or procedure comes forward to the executive for final signoff in which case we're taking personal responsibility that this is the safest we can make this task in the Bureau, we've got the confidence of knowing people who actually have to implement it have had a look at it. But more importantly I think it's then well socialised. So by the time it's released and people are actually using it people go "Yeah. I know about this. I contributed to it" and therefore have a sense of ownership with its implementation as well. And I think that's been a really big success factor in terms of how effective our very small workplace health and safety team have been.

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**David Caple:**

Just in that context of the sort of hazards that you're having to confront, realising that you're part of the government public sector industry but it sounds like there have been some interesting challenges along the way. Do you want to give us some insight into the sort of hazards that you do deal with?

**Vicki Middleton:**

Look I think one thing that's unique about the Bureau – so when I joined the Bureau I joined in January and the first workplace health and safety incident that was raised with me was an encounter someone had had in one of our sheds with a snake. And it wasn't a very friendly sort of snake. But our most common hazard or the most common hazard that's reported particularly during summer is venomous snake encounters within the Bureau. So for us that's great. You sort of can say to people "Look avoid them." But one of the things that's fantastic about the Bureau was we had had three snake incidents in a week basically and so we got extra alert information out to people.

We did a review of "Do we have the best personal protective equipment on site for every single person?", "Do we have enough equipment to cover contractors?", "How do we actually assure ourselves that our observation sites are not attractive habitat to snakes?", "So how are we actually keeping those sites cleaned and maintained and mowed?", "How are we making sure that every person who's on one of those sites is first aid trained?" right down to the level of detail of having snake identification cards in every vehicle that goes on site. All the details of right through to RFDS or who's the most appropriate person to contact in the event that you've done your first aid and you need extra support, and even the contact details of the local herpetologist because the last thing we want is you disappearing into the shed to try and retrieve that snake yourself. What we want you to do is call an expert and make sure that when that expert comes to retrieve the snake that they've had the workplace health and safety briefing for our site before they go and get the snake.

So it's just – most public servants wouldn't encounter a snake in their day-to-day job but it's a really common hazard for the Bureau.

**David Caple:**

So Rob with that context, being a leader of a big organisation as the Bureau, what are the two or three things that you see as critical for the CEO of an organisation with complex supply chains such as the business you're in?

**Rob Vertessy:**

Well look I think everything we do turns on a great work health and safety team to start with and if you haven't got one you've just got to go out and get one. I think there are three things that I really look for in the team. One is knowledge – deep knowledge about how to approach it because it is a complex, multilayered issue particularly when you contemplate supply chains. The second is networked. Clearly we want a team that's plugged into the national work health and safety scene and can get access to the intelligence that's coming through all the time and help us to calibrate ourselves against best practice. And the third is just simply responsiveness – a team that can identify a problem but also get on top of it with a – help us get on top of it with a solution. So a great team is critical and I'm proud and grateful that I have one of those.

The second thing then of course is obviously getting the senior leadership of the organisation approaching work health and safety from the right standpoint, not from a compliance standpoint but with an authentic posture around care for our people. I think that's very, very important and conveying that to our staff and infecting them I suppose with the same ethos I think is critical.

The third is just the routine regular stuff. You need the systems, the procedures, the policies in place and then a commitment to monitoring conformance with them. That's just good old belt and braces stuff but you can't forget that – that follow-through. So they'd be the three things that I think are most important from a leader's perspective.

**David Caple:**

In a minute we'll take questions from our audience here. So while we get organised to do that, is there any advice that you would give to your colleague CEOs who are in this same journey but maybe struggling to achieve what you have achieved? The critical ingredients you've outlined, but what differentiates you from others in this same? Is it the quality of the health and safety advice? Is it the systems and processes? Is there anything that struck you having worked in the CSIRO and other organisations that sets the model in the Bureau differently?

**Rob Vertessy:**

Well look, other than those things that I mentioned earlier I think a key thing is to maintain a real sense of kind of self-criticism and to continue being self-critical. In fact one of the issues we're dealing with at the moment is that we've had quite a few successes in work health and safety getting recognised for good practice, getting awards and the like. It can all get a little celebratory and back-slapping like at times and kind of pulling yourself up and really accepting that you can never be fully safe is a very important thing and getting your mind around that idea that all you can ever do is get close to being safe.

So instilling that in people even at times when you're celebrating as you should do, celebrating successes in work health and safety I think is for me a real key. And that's something we're grappling with at the moment. You know, how do we keep raising the bar all the time so that we're getting closer – closer to perfect? Never perfect but closer to it.

**David Caple:**

And Vicki you've worked in different agencies. So what struck you when you came?

**Vicki Middleton:**

I joined the Bureau in 2012 and I remember my first executive meeting where workplace health and safety was on the agenda and for starters the report that we received was fantastic. There was every single incident that had been reported for that financial year. There was good information about where it occurred, what had occurred. There was some analysis in there about how many other times this type of incident had occurred, where incidents were starting to head more into what I'd call the realm of not being reportable but heading in that direction. There was a lot more analysis in there plus how the workplace health and safety team was working with the responsible program.

So I think one of the key things is we don't rely on our workplace health and safety team to take an issue that comes up in discussion in executive to go and fix that problem. The workplace health and safety team facilitate, guide, cajole, support the actual manager who's ultimately accountable for safe delivery of a specific task to do a better job. And I think one of the things that was really refreshing in joining the Bureau was that the conversation about workplace health and safety was never about conformance. It wasn't about "Will we be compliant?" It was all about "How can we do this better?" And so it was just really encouraging that the ethos of the organisation was all about making sure everyone had a fulfilling job, they were able to fulfil their role within the Bureau in a safe way but it was about continuous improvement.

So even though Rob said "We have had some great successes" and we really have, that's not an excuse to become complacent. It's about how do we make sure we continue to challenge could we make this even better practice every time the executive meets every month to talk about workplace health and safety?

**David Caple:**

Well done. Let's just see what questions we might have from the audience that we have with us today. Anybody would like to ask a question whilst we're all together? Yes? Would you mind just standing up so that we can...

**Audience Member:**

Amanda Grey, Safe Work Australia. I am just interested I guess in your risk appetite. I've heard what you're saying about particularly being in the Pacific and so on and different cultures and I'm just wondering whether you feel as a public sector organisation you're more risk averse towards health and safety matters? Or you sort of take on more sort of construction ethos I guess and you might push the envelope occasionally? I'm just interested in how you sort of characterise that appetite for risk in regards to health and safety?

**Rob Vertessy:**

Look I'll have a go and maybe you can back me up.

(Laughter)

Look I'd never look at it in that way. For us we start from the standpoint of zero harm. So it's very, very low, if zero risk tolerance I think would be the flat answer to that. So we would always approach – approach each and every mission from the standpoint of great kind of concern, great vigilance I guess in...

**Vicki Middleton:**

I think also while we are approaching it from great vigilance it is about managing risk effectively and understanding what are the factors that are likely to contribute to a risk manifesting. So the extra effort that's been put in, into pre-planning and making sure we've got appropriate safe work practices in place I think helps us to mitigate risk to a large extent.

The other thing about the Bureau is we are an organisation that engages every day with the private sector. So we have our people out on oil and gas rigs. We have our people on airports. We have our people going to mine sites. We have our people in locations where we can quite often benchmark how our work health and safety and our risk benchmarks against the private sector and others. And to be quite honest we're up there with the best of them in terms of what we're doing. But it is about making sure we do that planning before we go and if we find a vulnerability not saying "Oh well, we'll fix that up next time." Taking the time to do everything we can to make it as safe as possible before we go.

**David Caple:**

Thanks for that question. Any more questions? Yes.

**Audience Member:**

Thank you David. Barry Sherriff. I'm a lawyer sorry but also Chair of the SRCC. A two-pronged question. One is what blockers do you find in resistance from those that you work with and secondly how do you overcome that in circumstances where you really don't have a lot of choice in remote environments to take on other contractors or other suppliers?

**David Caple:**

Thanks Barry.

**Vicki Middleton:**

Thanks Barry. Just so everyone knows Barry's given us some training as well but this answer isn't based on that.

(Laughter)

So I think one of the things for us is actually making sure your executive and your senior leaders are well trained, that they actually understand what are the consequences of taking the easy road rather than necessarily the best road. So for us that is part of our culture in our organisation is making sure every single one of our managers and every person who's got a responsibility for implementing good practice on our sites is aware of the consequences of taking a short cut.

Look I think it's interesting. Often in very remote locations you actually find the workplace health and safety standards are better than in some other contexts and that's because they have to do more pre-planning. It's harder to get equipment on site. It takes a long time to get there. So we often find we get less resistance on very remote sites and it's often in more common contexts where people say "We can just duck down to Bunnings and fix that" that sometimes the pre-planning isn't quite there.

So we certainly make sure that when we go out to procure a subcontractor that we make sure that they provide us with information about how they're going to operate on-site. We make sure they give us evidence of how they're going to comply with our safe work practices. As I mentioned earlier, value for money for us isn't necessarily about the lowest possible price. It's actually about how they will deliver the task we want in accordance with our safe work practices. So for us, it's about making sure we subcontract to those who are appropriately qualified and satisfy us that they can meet those requirements and we also make sure that we do follow-up work at the end of the contract to satisfy or assure ourselves that they've done the appropriate work.

I think where we do – and it is in rare circumstances – where we do get resistance and we're not satisfied, we simply won't allow the contractor on site. So if we're not satisfied when they get their workplace health and safety briefing when they turn up on day one if we're not satisfied we won't continue the contract. We'll send them away to do more work and we don't have a problem with saying "We've got to stop." And I think that's incredibly powerful for staff to know that they are empowered to do that when there is resistance to do the right thing.

We've also got a bit smarter ourselves in terms of when we are working in remote areas we don't deploy staff to go and work in remote locations until we know all the equipment we need to perform the task is on site ready for them to start work so there's less inclination to fiddle or do other things that might not be as safe for them to do. So I think for us we want people to behave as if they were one of the Bureau and we look for evidence that they will perform in that way right the way through the procurement stage, right through to when they've finished the job and we're satisfied that it's been delivered.

**David Caple:**

Would you add anything Rob?

**Rob Vertessy:**

Look, the only other thing is again I think psychology of our people is something that needs to be constantly worked on. A lot of those procedures that we put in place for working overseas for instance we had to actually demonstrate up front that there was a real long term benefit as well as a safety objective being met. The pre-planning effort that goes in now actually saves people time in the field. So there is a genuine productivity benefit there as well. That might not be apparent to many people at first but we've found that it is the case. So yeah. I think mindset – changing mindset proves to be a constant challenge.

**David Caple:**

The pre-planning piece and the role of your procurement purchasing department, are they part of this consultation process?

**Rob Vertessy:**

Yes they are.

**Vicki Middleton:**

Absolutely.

**Rob Vertessy:**

It's embedded in our procurement guidelines. We have explicit procedures also for working with contractors. It's all the way from the Accountable Authority Instructions all the way down to very detailed safe work method statements. It's got to be at every level of the chain.

**Vicki Middleton:**

So it's actually a requirement under our Accountable Authority Instructions that the financial delegate who's actually signing off on the contract is also signing off on the workplace health and safety side of things. They're saying "This represents the best value for money because it conforms with our requirements across the board of the tender."

**David Caple:**

Any other questions? Yes.

**Audience Member:**

Thanks. Janice Batt from Safe Work Australia. I'm just interested to tease out some of the details about the supply chain aspects of your work. And I'm sort of picturing some of those scenarios where things can get a little bit in perhaps other countries where you don't have as much in the way of control.

Potentially, you use temporary workers from time to time, migrant workers perhaps in Australia in some of the more remote areas. Potentially, aircraft that is chartered rather than mainstream. I mean these are things or areas where work health and safety is known as quite problematic or quite challenging and I'd just really be interested to hear you sort of give us some of your benefit and your wisdom in those areas because I'm sure that you've been confronted with them from time to time?

**Rob Vertessy:**

Yes.

**David Caple:**

Thanks Janice.

**Rob Vertessy:**

There is a remarkable diversity. Yes - many, many countries each with different contexts. European nations are probably a lot more routine to work in than are some Pacific Islanders. There are contractors and collaborators. There are locally hired staff. As you say a huge variety. I think ultimately though you can

always reduce it always back to the prerequisite to actually conduct a detailed risk assessment for the particular circumstance that you're walking into. That sets up the discipline I suppose to imagine all the pitfalls that you could be walking into.

So again it's this pre-planning piece. It's doing that risk assessment and coming up with appropriate controls that can be put in place in the country of mission. Anything you want to add?

**Vicki Middleton:**

I think the only thing I'd add to that is particularly where we're doing things offshore, those are projects where we've actually applied to deliver those. So for us we go through a significant amount of financial workplace health and safety work before we even decide to put our hat in the ring. So it means that when we are applying to AusAID to deliver a project overseas we've done quite a lot of due diligence before we've even asked Rob to sign off on us submitting that application.

Same with the work we do for the aviation industry and for Defence and for the offshore oil and gas industry. We actually do quite a bit of work to say "Well how does this align with our risk appetite?" and "Is there anything in the nature of this business contract that we're going to enter into to deliver this work that would see us needing to do anything additional to what we would otherwise do in the Bureau?" So we're always working from that foundation of what we do to deliver the public weather forecast and then doing an assessment to say "Do we need to factor anything else into this to make sure that we can maintain those highest possible standards of workplace health and safety regardless of who the person is that we're delivering this new service for?"

**David Caple:**

Thank you for that. Any last question before we wrap up our discussions for the afternoon? Yes.

**David Caple:**

Hi. Jacinta Galluzzo from Safe Work Australia. Just following on from that a lot of the sort of answers that you've given to questions today have covered this pre-work that you do. But I guess I'm just interested in understanding more about how your work health and safety governance arrangements apply in host countries once you've got workers on the ground?

**Vicki Middleton:**

Look, what we actually do is for each mission there's of course the pre-work that we do but physically once we're on the ground because the COSPPac work is a program of work that's been being delivered over a number of years, we actually have established quite long term relationships not only with the met organisations or the relevant government organisations that we're working with to do the capability building, what we actually do is we do regular planning conferences in country with each of those and workplace health and safety is clearly a component of that. So even though we have a program of work there are still regular planning sessions that occur with the countries that we're actually delivering services into because the intent of these programs is actually for us to leave. It's about building their capability so they can continue to do that themselves.

So for us, it's about how do we actually start to build and mirror the governance practices that we use in the Bureau and help to instil those in the organisations that we're working with overseas so that they can start to see how some of our practice helps us operationally with procuring equipment, installing it safely, our maintenance regimes, the sort of manuals and safe work practice schedules that we use and we leave those in country.

But what we actually do is we try and work with those countries to say "What else could we do with this to make it more appropriate to Fiji or to make it more appropriate to the Solomon Islands?" so that we're actually building that capability – a bit like the process that our workplace health and safety team has gone through within the Bureau to socialise our procedures and practices before we actually formally release them. We're trying to mirror that process in country to build the capability of the groups we're working with to be able to continue to do that for themselves longer term.

**Rob Vertessy:**

The only thing I'd add to that is that when we are actively involved on site ourselves clearly the critical role of the site controller/site manager is very important and having real role clarity around that and ensuring that our collaborators and clients have that as well. That's key. In instances we're actually relying on contractors and subcontractors and we start getting ourselves a bit removed I suppose from the control on the site, then it's all about making sure that they are properly briefed and that we are then later on doing checks or audits on their understanding and their compliance with our expectations. So that becomes important in that context.

**David Caple:**

Excellent. Well, we might draw the session to a close and I'd like to thank Rob and Vicki...

**Vicki Middleton:**

Thank you.

**Rob Vertessy:**

Thank you.

**David Caple:**

...for your open discussions about how to manage what is an international 24/7 business involving supply chains with many external contractors and stakeholders around the world. And I think your supply chains involving the supply of products and also providing services show us how the systems and accountability processes that you've got in place gives you some confidence that you're doing as far as reasonably practicable to manage that and the leadership that you're providing in that. And your humbleness in saying "You can never take it for granted".

**Vicki Middleton:**

You can't.

**David Caple:**

Reminds us that this is an ongoing challenge for all businesses in the supply chain model including those in the government sector.

So I'd like to ask the audience to join me and thank our speakers for this interesting presentation today. Thank you.

(Audience Applause)

§ (Music Playing) §

**[End of Transcript]**