

Issue 5, April 2005

Welcome to the April issue of People Matters. Occupational Health and Safety is the focus this month as new laws come into effect in Victoria on 1 July. We are also aware that over the last few months WorkSafe have been randomly inspecting workplaces. Generally an improvement notice is issued with timeframes to action depending on the desired outcome.

None of our OH&S clients have reported problems identified as a result of an inspection. Now is a good time to review your existing processes and put in place some refresher training for your people – including office staff. Give either Laura or Carolyn a call for assistance.

Web Sites to Reference

There is a lot of information available on the web. Some useful Government sites to bookmark are:

WorkSafe Victoria

www.worksafe.vic.gov.au

Small Business Commissioner

www.sbc.vic.gov.au

Wagenet (also their online newsletter 'Workplace News')

www.wagenet.gov.au

Business Entry Point

www.business.gov.au/Business+Entry+Point

Let us know if you have other sites that you refer to and we will update the list in a future issue.



New OH&S Laws

Extensive changes have been introduced to the Act and it is considered to be highly prescriptive in imposing increased obligations upon employers.

A number of key principles, to be applied as far as reasonably practicable, have been stated. They include:

- Everyone should be given the highest level of protection against risks to their health and safety
- Any person who manages, owns or controls workplaces is responsible for eliminating or reducing risks
- Employees should be encouraged to be represented on health and safety issues.

In practice some of the changes are:

- The inclusion of psychological health is confirmed, meaning employees need to be protected from issues such as work related stress and work place bullying.
- There is a general duty to consult more widely with employees, with penalties imposed for not doing so.
- Right of entry for unions is increased, but only where there is a reasonable basis for suspecting a contravention. (A magistrates permit must first be obtained.)
- Inspectors may provide advice and guidelines on how to comply, and their decisions can be reviewed.
- Designers of buildings and structures have a new duty (commencing 1 July 2006).
- Penalties for breach of general duties have increased to a maximum of \$900,000 for companies and \$180,000 for individuals.

Do you have a question you would like answered? Topics and suggestions are always welcome.