

“We really need to do something about our work health and safety...”

... but we have absolutely NO idea where to start!”

The current paradigm in rural industries suggests that when people think of ‘compliance’ with work health and safety legislation, they think of penalties, policies and procedures. Box-ticking, dust collecting, perceived as costly and convoluted – and yet we forget – that the *intent* of compliance, is simply, ‘just don’t kill someone.’

What’s even more ironic about this, is that there is literally not one line in the 601 pages of work health and safety legislation that states to the letter that you need to have a ‘documented safe work procedure’. Mind = blown.

So what does it all mean, particularly for a small business?

In 2012, Safe Work Australia stripped away its emphasis on the need for ‘safety paperwork’ in order to provide business owners with additional flexibility as to how they choose to manage risk. This change acknowledged that what might work for a mining corporation may not work for a farm, that not all businesses are the same, nor do they have an infinite number of resources to ‘do’ work health and safety.

What legislation does say, is that you need to ‘manage the risk to as low as reasonably practicable’... which put simply, means: ‘do your very best not to hurt anyone – in the context of your business’.

The tricky part is that there is an entire profession out there that has wedded itself to the old paradigm that ‘to have safety paperwork’ is ‘to have safer outcomes’, and furthermore that to ‘cover your butt’ (with paperwork) is somehow more important than *actually doing something* to manage a risk.

Fact: you don’t need to ‘cover your butt’ if nobody gets hurt in the first place, and the best evidence of compliance is when you – or one of your workers – can competently show and tell someone how to do the job safely.

Where to from here?

1. Focus on the big stuff.

Don’t waste your time and your money on creating mountains of paperwork that doesn’t necessarily add any value nor does it actually reduce the likelihood of someone getting hurt.

Get laser-focussed on what could go wrong, how it could go wrong and what you’re going to do about it. Prioritise, and take-action on the things that could actually save a life. E.g. guards around augers, fences around house dams, regular comms for remote work and conversations about mental health. Yes – it is ‘common sense’ – however the key is in making it explicit... so each and every person understands *exactly* what ‘to have common sense’ actually means.

2. Have a conversation!

30 years ago, nobody wore seatbelts, and today we do it without even thinking about it.

Culture change doesn’t happen overnight, and personal choice and engrained habit play a big role in why people get hurt at work. Talk the talk, walk the walk and start a conversation that will eventually make it universally ‘not cool’ to be unsafe or to take shortcuts.

3. Do your best.

Work health and safety legislation is there to hold people accountable and to manage criminal negligence... that is, those who make a deliberate choice *not* to take steps to prevent themselves or others from getting hurt.

You and those you work with are the experts, and only you can possibly know what 'doing your best' might look like. Take practical, meaningful steps to prevent people from getting hurt, and be prepared to share that stories with others who may not understand what 'being safe' means in the context of your workplace.

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COMMON SENSE

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<http://www.hartfieldsite.org.au/pages/resources/healthy-farmers.php>

