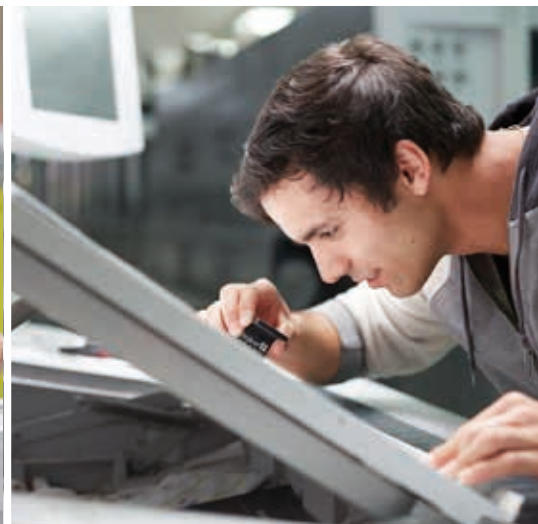


How to select a workplace health and safety consultant





Introduction

Choosing the right workplace health and safety consultant for your organisation will help support your health and safety activities. They provide an important resource when you need specialist advice and services. Before selecting a consultant, it's important to understand what they do and how they can help your organisation.

The new laws for workplace health and safety – the Health and Safety at Work Act means that organisations have a greater focus on managing health and safety. Many are reviewing, changing and developing their health and safety strategies and systems to make sure they are managing their workplace health and safety effectively.

Most organisations do not have enough people with the right training to cover all the issues necessary for good management of workplace health and safety. Consultants can offer expertise in specific areas so that problems can be solved, or they can provide on-going support where a full-time health and safety manager or advisor is not needed.

The Health and Safety Association of New Zealand (HASANZ) is the national umbrella organisation representing workplace health and safety professionals and can help you secure the right type of assistance.

Working out what the problem is

Before you contact a consultant it helps to know what you want them to do. Most consultants will try and work this out when you first contact them. However, it's important to be prepared so that there is effective use of everyone's time. When working out what you want a consultant to help with, consider:

1. Using: "who? what? where? when? why? and how?" to help guide your thinking.
2. Involving your workers, especially those who are being affected by the problem.
3. That problems are often interlinked. A flow chart or diagram may help identify the areas that you want a consultant to work on, as well as those areas that you decide you want your organisation to manage.
4. Trying to narrow the problem to reasonable 'chunks'. This will help later when you are deciding what you want the consultant to focus on.

Remember that it is important to engage other people in the process such as your worker representatives, health and safety committee, workplace health and safety personnel, and those that may be affected by the problem.

A precise definition of your problem will help you to choose your consultant.

List your requirements

Write down what it is you want your consultant to do. It can help you in the planning stages and later it will help you and your consultant decide if you have achieved your objectives.

You may wish to list the measures you will use to judge whether the tasks were successfully accomplished. You will want to select criteria that are “SMART” (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound). For example, the measures may be related to:

- cost (reduction in absenteeism or staff turnover);
- participation (increased attendance at health and safety meetings);
- behaviour (% increase in wearing personal protective equipment);
- reporting (% increase in reporting events);
- information (noticeboards have monthly health and safety updates posted);
- documentation (completed working alone policy and procedure);
- physical work environment (machine guarding assessments completed for all machines);
- injury reduction (% reduction in total recordable injury frequency rate);
- health (reduction in airborne contaminants).

Development of a brief

A brief helps the consultant to estimate the time and cost of the project. It should provide information such as:

- the activities of the organisation and its current workplace health and safety programme;
- what you understand the problem is;
- what your requirements are;
- the objectives you want to achieve;
- an assessment of the level of risk;
- the resources to be provided by the company, including personnel;
- timeframes;
- budget guidelines;
- any reporting or progress requirements;
- any special conditions which might affect the consultancy project.

The more information you give the consultant, the better they will be able to prepare an estimate of the cost, timeframe and any other issues.

What type of consultant?

There isn't just one type of workplace health and safety consultant to choose from; rather there is a wide range of professionals providing advice and services in different fields in the occupational health and safety sector.

It's important to be aware that health and safety covers many areas and no single workplace health and safety professional will have the answers to every workplace health and safety problem. You may need to use more than one consultant, or a group of consultants. Some consultants will have quite specific areas of expertise while others may have skills across a range of areas. A good consultant will know their limitations and refer you to others with the appropriate knowledge, skills or experience for your needs if the job is outside their experience or scope of practice.

If you're not sure what type of professional you need, you may need to talk to a few to get a clearer idea – a good consultant will help you define what the problem is when you agree the brief with them. The following gives an outline of the main types of consultants working in the workplace health and safety sector.

Types of consultants

● Ergonomists – or Human Factors Professionals

Ergonomics (also called ‘human factors’) is concerned with ensuring optimal job performance with safety, health, comfort and efficiency.

A key factor in an ergonomics approach is determining the match between people and their activities, equipment, environment and work systems.

Ergonomists can:

- undertake ergonomics analysis of tasks, workplaces, and work systems using a variety of tools including biomechanical analysis, anthropometrics, interviews, questionnaires, and physical measurements;
- develop and recommend options for ergonomics intervention/design;
- facilitate the implementation of interventions/designs;
- provide advice on the impact of relevant legislation, codes of practice, NZ/ Australian Standards and industry-based standards;
- evaluate changes introduced into the workplace and make recommendations regarding future interventions;
- use research to underpin and inform their work;
- assist in the early stages of a design concept, so that human factors are an integral part of project design specifications;
- assist in planning renovations or upgrades and help specify characteristics of new equipment or systems;
- assist in testing and user trialling of equipment and workstations;
- determine the demands placed on people by their activities, equipment, environment and systems and determine people’s capacity to interact optimally with their work system;
- assist in the prevention of accidents and disease, and help investigate causes and develop prevention strategies;

- investigate problems such as manual handling, fatigue, loss of vigilance and heavy/intense workloads;
- provide training and education in ergonomics.

Ergonomists usually have a postgraduate diploma or Master's Degree in Ergonomics and may be Professional Members (either Certified or Associate, depending on their education, training and experience) the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society of New Zealand.

Occupational Health and Safety Nurse Consultants

The occupational health and safety nurse consultant provides a holistic approach to the maintenance of healthy and safe places of work. They are able to advise on legislative obligations, strategic planning and policy development as they relate to health and safety.

An occupational health and safety nurse consultant may help with:

- health monitoring of the health hazards that people are exposed to in the course of their work;
- employment health assessments based on essential functions criteria – determine work fitness from a physical, social, psychological perspective using best practice guidelines;
- providing injury and illness management in the workplace, along with stay-at-work or return-to-work planning;
- working collaboratively with other health professionals, workplace management teams, and workers to determine the best health outcomes by developing sound relationships and referral processes;
- assisting with environmental control and accident (injury) prevention by assessing, planning and developing health and safety systems, working collaboratively towards prevention and reducing risk in the workplace;
- effectively managing occupational health services such as wellness, risk prevention, injury management in cooperation and liaison with the workplace management team and health and safety advisors;
- providing health education in specific presentations on work and well-health related topics that will improve health indicators;
- assessing workers (functional capacity and work habits), workplace (ergonomics and layout of workstation and general environment) and work (processes and requisite work skill);
- reviewing work spaces from an ergonomic perspective;
- educating workers on principles of working healthily and safely, lifestyle choices and workplace ergonomics;
- identifying risk to health hazards and recommending means of hazard management and risk control;
- health and safety performance appraisals and auditing;
- screening for chemicals that impact on the health;
- drug and alcohol testing and management in the workplace;
- health counselling (stress and work related mental health issues that arise in or impact on the workplace);

- immunisation vaccinations for flu, hepatitis and tetanus for those at risk in the workplace.

An occupational health and safety nurse consultant will be a New Zealand Registered Nurse with a current Practising Certificate and will have, as a primary qualification, a diploma or degree in nursing. Some hold post graduate qualifications in injury prevention, vocational rehabilitation or workplace health and safety. They are likely to be a member of the New Zealand Occupational Health Nurses Association.

Occupational Health Physiotherapists

Physiotherapy is concerned with the assessment, diagnosis, treatment, evaluation and follow-up of injuries and diseases affecting human movement.

Occupational health physiotherapists can:

- undertake assessments of the workplace to identify and minimise individuals' discomfort, pain and injury and prevent the progression of these into major or long-term problems;
- provide rehabilitation of the injured through assessment of the injury, workplace design, working methods and designing and implementing treatment plans that allow early restoration of function (treatment may be delivered on or off site) including pain management strategies;
- develop, co-ordinate and monitor graduated return-to-work programmes, taking into account the individual's capabilities and any limitations or restriction of movement and function, in addition to identifying and addressing non-physical barriers to returning to work;
- conduct physical and functional assessments to determine someone's physical capabilities and capacities to be matched against their work requirements;
- assess the workplace environment, tasks and demands and provide advice and recommendations to minimise risk to all workers;
- design and deliver injury prevention, physical fitness and stress management programmes;
- advise on ways to implement certain occupational health and safety strategies.

An occupational health physiotherapist will have a degree or diploma enabling registration with the New Zealand Physiotherapy Registration Board, hold a current Annual Practising Certificate and is usually a member of Physiotherapy New Zealand and the Occupational Health Physiotherapy Group. Some hold additional post-graduate qualifications in the area of Occupational Health.

Occupational Hygienists

Occupational hygiene (also called industrial hygiene) is the scientific and technical approach to the recognition, evaluation and control of chemical, physical and biological factors which may adversely affect the health, safety, comfort and efficiency of people employed in the work environment.

Occupational hygienists can:

- check work environments and processes for health and safety hazards and risks related to chemical agents (dust, gases, vapours), physical agents (heat, cold, noise, radiation) and biological agents (viruses, bacteria, moulds);
- develop strategies for evaluating the work site to determine the degree of risk;
- assess potential worker exposure to risk from agents often through precise use of specialist equipment (e.g. collection and analysis of samples);
- measure levels of physical agents such as light, heat, noise and radiation;
- measure airborne exposure of contaminants and compare them against appropriate standards and guidelines;
- evaluate the effectiveness of control strategies (e.g. personal protective equipment, ventilation systems);
- interpret results of exposure evaluations in conjunction with working conditions and tasks or processes to ascertain health risks;
- work with teams to design and implement control measures;
- work with teams at the design stage to engineer out health hazards;
- provide clear and accurate data on complex health and safety issues including new and emerging health hazards;
- compile data, write reports and present findings to clients in a clear and easily understood way;
- educate staff on health issues such as risks from, or control of, substances hazardous to health;
- advise managers and workers about regulations, standards, legal compliance, risk assessment and ways to reduce risk.

Occupational hygienists usually hold professional qualifications in science or engineering. The grade of the practitioner's membership in the New Zealand Occupational Hygiene Society reflects the level of their knowledge, experience and professional development.

Workplace Health and Safety Consultants

Workplace health and safety consultants sometimes called 'health and safety generalists', provide broad-based strategic and practical advice, support and analysis to organisations on a wide range of aspects of health and safety. There are two main types of consultant: a workplace health and safety professional and a workplace health and safety practitioner.

Workplace health and safety professionals operate at a more strategic level and can design an organisation's health and safety management strategy within the wider context of business processes and external regulatory, market and societal influences. Influential with senior management, they are advisers on problem solving and organisational change. Their advice is based on conceptual and technical knowledge of design and operations, enabling them to extend their understanding to control complex health and safety risks. Workplace health and safety professionals understand how to access, use, critically evaluate and develop the evidence base and they value professional collaboration. They are more likely to gain their health and safety education through the higher education sector.

Workplace health and safety practitioners tend to take a more practical, hands-on approach. They are likely to focus on the workplace and the organisation's primary processes and communicate predominantly at middle management, supervisor and shop-floor levels. They support a safe working environment by maintaining health and safety administrative processes, conducting basic training and using a range of state-of-the-art tools, processes and standard practice solutions to manage health and safety risks. Particularly focused on evaluating routine and well-known processes and work, workplace health and safety practitioners oversee and drive monitoring and compliance in relation to technical and behavioural risk controls. They usually gain their health and safety education through the vocational or technical education sector.

Workplace health and safety consultants can help with:

- identifying, assessing and controlling critical health and safety risks in the work environment;
- developing, implementing and managing health and safety systems including developing health and safety policies and procedures, and designating responsibilities for health and safety;
- integrating health and safety strategic and operational planning with broader organisational and operational planning;
- designing and implementing systems for monitoring and reporting on organisational health and safety performance;
- providing advice on compliance with applicable laws, regulations and standards;
- fostering participation and engagement with workers;

- evaluating the financial impact of health and safety risks, and building business cases to support appropriate controls;
- determining the need for additional advice by other workplace health and safety professionals;
- management and worker training;
- management of contractors and other workers;
- incorporating essential health and safety requirements in purchasing and contracting specifications;
- advising on applying safety principles in design and manufacture to achieve maximum product safety;
- development of emergency response systems;
- accident or incident investigations with detailed reports that identify root cause;
- rehabilitation policy and claims management systems.

A workplace health and safety consultant usually has a health and safety related qualification and a wide range of experience. Membership of the New Zealand Institute of Safety Management, New Zealand Safety Council or another management-based institution (such as Risk NZ) is expected. The consultant could also be a member of an affiliated professional association, such as the New Zealand Occupational Health Nurses Association.

Occupational Physicians (Doctors)

Occupational medicine is concerned with the medical aspects of the influence of work on people's health as well as the effects of a person's health on work.

The main responsibilities of an occupational physician are:

- surveillance of all factors which may affect the health of workers;
- advising management, workers and their representatives about these factors;
- job analysis based on occupational hygiene, physiological and psychological considerations. This assists in the best matching of work to workers;
- participation in injury and disease prevention programmes and the prescription of protective equipment;
- pre-employment, periodic and special medical examinations of workers. This may involve physical examination, laboratory investigations and biological monitoring;
- management of those with temporary or permanent disabilities or illness to provide a diagnosis and to enable appropriate job placement and to help rehabilitation;
- providing advice on disorders that may be caused or aggravated by work;
- treatment of occupational injuries and disease;
- research into occupational health issues;
- compilation of health statistics;
- management of occupational health and safety services.

Occupational physicians are medical specialists registered with the New Zealand Medical Council. They have Fellowships from recognised specialist occupational medicine faculties, such as the Australasian Faculty of Occupational Medicine. Some General Practitioners also provide occupational medicine services and many are highly experienced and capable - most have postgraduate qualifications including Diplomas in Occupational Health Practice, Industrial Health, Occupational Medicine or Aviation Medicine. A number of Occupational Physicians and General Practitioners are members of the Australian/New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine.

Occupational Therapists

Occupational therapy is a client-centred health profession concerned with promoting health and well-being through occupation. Occupational therapists assist people who experience trauma, physical or mental illness, or disability to participate and become independent in activities required for self-care, work, leisure or play. In workplace health and safety consultancy, occupational therapists can be involved in prevention, management and treatment or modification of the occupation or environment to support engagement in work activities, as follows:

- assessment of the worker (physical/cognitive/psycho-social ability and work habits), workplace (layout of the workstation and general environment), and work (job processes and requisite work skills);
- job analysis, assessment of all factors affecting job performance, and assistance with appropriate placement for those returning to work, prior to return, on the job, or after relocation;
- developing and monitoring of return-to-work programmes;
- consultation with workers, employers and those involved in the rehabilitation process, treatment providers, legal practitioners, ACC case managers and the worker's family;
- workplace design and modification, taking into account safe work practices and ergonomic evaluations – this may include providing adapted equipment for those with disabilities and liaison with appropriate funding agencies;
- education programmes, including stress management, healthy lifestyles, injury prevention and principles of working safely.

An occupational therapist will have an academic qualification in occupational therapy, must be registered with the Occupational Therapy Board of New Zealand and hold a current Annual Practising Certificate.

A consultant occupational therapist can be expected to have undertaken further education relevant to workplace health and safety and demonstrate current knowledge of developments in this field. The consultant is likely to be a member of Occupational Therapy New Zealand.

Technical and Engineering Specialists

In many cases, the solution to or management of a safety problem will involve technical, chemical, biological or engineering elements. For example, a machinery safety problem may be addressed by designing and installing mechanical guarding or other safety features, or the risks posed by hazardous substances may be controlled by appropriate storage or finding a suitable alternative substance.

A wide range of specialists can assist businesses or organisations with technical solutions to health and safety problems. These include hazardous substances specialists and professional engineers.

Hazardous substances specialists can assist with advice and certification relating to the transport, storage, handling and control of hazardous substances, such as toxic, corrosive and flammable substances. They include hazardous substances compliance certifiers and hazardous substances consultants. Hazardous substances compliance certifiers provide a statutory compliance role and are familiar with the legislation and regulations covering hazardous substances. They are independent consultants approved in their statutory role by WorkSafe New Zealand. Limitations apply to which classes of hazardous substances each compliance certifier can issue certificates for.

Hazardous substances consultants can provide a wider perspective on the management of hazardous substances, dangerous goods, environmentally hazardous substances and associated risks. They can assist with:

- managing the environmental impacts of hazardous substances;
- interpretation of relevant legislation;
- lodging new substance approvals with the Environmental Protection Agency;
- writing safety data sheets.

Both compliance certifiers and hazardous substances consultants are likely to be members of the New Zealand Institute of Hazardous Substances Management.

Professional engineers can assist with a wide range of safety problems. They apply fundamental physical principles to eliminate or minimise risks to people.

Professional engineers have a wide-ranging scope of work but, if the safety problem faced by a business is technical in nature or solution, then a professional engineer is likely to be helpful in resolving the issue. Depending on the problem, engineers from more than one discipline may be required.

Safety-related support that engineers provide can include:

- design of storage or transport tanks for hazardous substances;
- design and certification of operator protection structures on mobile plant;
- design of lifting equipment, cranes and pressure vessels under the PECPR regulations;

- design of guarding and other safety features on machinery;
- design and implementation of control systems on plant and machinery to minimise risks to operators and other persons;
- design of temporary structures and temporary works to manage risks during construction (for example, trench shoring during excavation);
- design and installation of ventilation systems.

Professional engineers are likely to be members of the Institution of Professional Engineers of New Zealand. In many instances, professional engineers working in health and safety fields will be registered as Chartered Professional Engineers, or will hold similar overseas registration.

Choosing a consultant

You need to match the consultant to your problem to make the best use of their expertise and your money. Worker representatives should be involved in the selection of a consultant as their input will be valuable, and it will encourage cooperation and support throughout the project. It's important to make sure that the consultant you choose has the right qualifications and skills to perform the work.

The Health and Safety Association of New Zealand (HASANZ) is in the process of developing a national online register of competent professionals working in the health and safety sector. In the meantime, they have produced a simple checklist of 5 quick questions to help you choose a qualified health and safety advisor.

HASANZ 5 quick questions

1. Which professional association do you belong to – can you confirm this?
2. What qualifications and/or certification do you have?
3. What relevant skills and experience do you have for this job?
4. Can you give me examples of similar work you have done recently?
5. Are you happy for us to contact your clients about your work for them?

Additional guidance is available on their website www.hasanz.org.nz

Following is a further list of questions you should consider asking the consultant to make sure you select the best type of professional, and the best person for the job.

Education

- Are their qualifications current and are they health and safety based? Do they match your needs?
- Do they hold post-graduate qualifications that provide the consultant with specialist knowledge?
- Has the consultant's education, training and experience been validated by a recognised New Zealand professional body?
- What sources have been used to update knowledge (courses, seminars, conferences recently attended)?

Experience

- How long have they been professionally active?
- How long have they been in private practice or worked for the consultancy?
- What is the nature of the consultant's clientele - have they helped clients with similar problems?
- Can you contact other organisations that the consultant has provided services for?
- Do they have any involvement in teaching/training other members of the profession?

Professional Affiliations

- Which professional associations does the consultant belong to?
- What is the level and duration of their membership?
- Are you able to see certification provided by the association?
- Is there a code of ethics that the consultant is guided by?

Special Capabilities

- What areas does the consultant specialise in?
- Does the consultant have access to specialised equipment or laboratories?
- Can the consultant serve as an expert witness?

Consultancy Status

- Is it a group or solo practice?
- If a solo practice, does the consultant have access to professionals with different and complementary expertise?
- If it is a group practice, is expertise available from colleagues? Who will actually be working on the project?

Business Practice

- What is the fee structure (e.g. hourly rate, retainer, or set fee)?
- Does the fee structure include all aspects of the project (e.g. travel time, disbursements, report writing, laboratory analysis)?
- Will some services be subcontracted or allocated to others?

- If others are involved, what is their level of training and what level of supervision is provided?
- Has the consultant provided a contract or similar agreement?
- Does the contract cover confidentiality, liability and patent rights?
- Does the consultant have professional indemnity, public liability and statutory liability insurance?
- What are the arrangements regarding advertising or endorsement for either party?
- Who has ownership of material produced for the project? Are there any restrictions?
- Are there any conflicts of interest?
- Are you able to see examples of reports the consultant has written previously?
- What are the timeframes for starting and finishing the work?

Monitoring the consultant's performance

When you engage a consultant you invest time and money. It is important to be able to determine if you have received the results you expected. The project brief should specify the measures you will use to judge the consultant's performance. Ideally, these will be agreed with the consultant at the outset, so both parties fully understand the requirements of the job and they are realistic. Regular meetings and progress reports from the consultant are an effective way of monitoring the work they are doing for you. This ensures that long-term projects run to time and budget and that both you and the consultant don't lose sight of the original objectives.

Disputes or complaints

If a dispute about the standard of work arises between you and a consultant, you should first approach them and try to resolve the issue. If this fails then the consultant's professional body should be approached as they will have complaints and disputes resolution procedures in place. This is one of the benefits of dealing with a consultant who belongs to a recognised professional association.

Sources of information about consultants

Injury Prevention and Management Consultants based at local ACC branches may be able to guide you on what type of consultant you need. Contact ACC on: 0800 222 776.

The Health and Safety Association of New Zealand (HASANZ) helps businesses access high quality, workplace health and safety advice, see www.hasanz.org.nz

Further information is available on HASANZ member associations' websites:

Australian/New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine www.ansom.org.nz

Human Factors and Ergonomics Society of New Zealand www.ergonomics.org.nz

Maintenance Engineers Society of New Zealand www.mesnz.org.nz

New Zealand of Hazardous Substances Management www.nzihsm.org.nz

New Zealand Institute of Safety Management www.nzism.co.nz

New Zealand Occupational Health Nurses Association www.nzohna.org.nz

New Zealand Occupational Hygiene Society www.nzohs.org.nz

New Zealand Safety Council www.safetycouncil.nz

Occupational Therapy New Zealand www.otnz.co.nz

Physiotherapy New Zealand (Occupational Health Group) www.physiotherapy.org.nz

Other sources of helpful information

Register of authorised compliance certifiers for hazardous substances
www.epa.govt.nz/search-databases/pages/testcertifiers-search.aspx

Institution of Professional Engineers New Zealand www.ipenz.nz

Register of Chartered Professional Engineers
www.registrationauthority.org.nz/search-register



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Te Kaporehanga Awhina Hunga Whara

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