

What to Look for in a Report

Introduction

One critical outcome when you engage a consultant is that you get a professional report that has valid findings. This is your record of the assessment and you may have to refer to it for WorkCover purposes, for the information of your staff, and possibly for legal reasons.

Reports should be structured and specify the reason why the assessment was undertaken, the methodology, results, and provide clear recommendations for control. References should be made to legislation and methodology such as that contained within Australian Standards, and exposure limits such as the WorkSafe Australia National Exposure Standards.

Format

Reports should be written in plain English, they should answer the question(s) raised at the beginning and satisfy the technical reader that the work was properly conducted and that the appropriate conclusions were drawn.

A typical report is divided into the following sections:

- Title
- Executive Summary
- Aim
- Legislation
- Process description
- Exposure Standards
- Methodology
- Results
- Recommendations

You should expect to be provided with two hard copies of the report (one for filing and one for staff), plus an electronic copy for long term storage. As a legislative requirement some OHS reports have to be retained for a period of 5-10 years. In this regard electronic copies are most suitable.

Title

The report should include a title page with the following information:

- Title summarising nature of survey eg *"Assessment of risk arising from employees exposure to XYZ..."*
- Date of report eg *March 1998*
- Name & address of company commissioning the work (the client)

- Name & address of person/organisation carrying out the work (the consultant)
- Name & signature of person who prepared the report eg *"Signed by..."* (the hygienist)

Where appropriate, name & signature of consultant who reviewed or approved the report eg *"Approved by..."* or *"Reviewed by..."* (the senior consultant or manager).

Executive Summary

This self contained section provides a short description of the audit, its results and recommendations.

Aim

This section explains why the report was needed (the purpose), the terms of reference under which the report was commissioned and what information was provided eg *"the company requested that an assessment be done as some employees had reported symptoms..."*, *"...an Inspector requested on Improvement Notice No 123, that the company assess the risk arising from employee's exposure to XYZ"*. Also the date(s) of visit(s) and the site(s) visited should be clearly identified.

Legislation

Where the audit has been conducted to satisfy a legislative requirement this should be clearly stated ie

The audit was conducted in response to and in accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety (Asbestos) Regulations 2003 Part - 6 - Demolition (including Refurbishment) where Asbestos is present.

The purpose of the audit was to:

- identify the location, extent, accessibility, type and condition of asbestos containing materials,
- review the risk assessment carried out under regulation 504 (part 5),
- assess the risk to workers of exposure to asbestos containing materials,
- assess the risk to site workers of exposure to other hazardous materials.

The report should provide detail the legislation and provide a clear outline of any obligations ie\

The relevant legislation is contained in the Occupational Health and Safety (Noise) Regulations 2004 and Code of Practice for Noise. These state that the exposure of employees should not exceed 85 dB(A) averaged over an 8 hour day, that is an Leq 8hr of 85 dB(A) and that the peak noise level should not exceed 140 dB(C).

The objectives of the Victorian Noise Regulations are to ensure that:

- *the exposure of employees to noise in the workplace is controlled so as to reduce the incidence and severity of hearing loss resulting from excessive exposure to noise, and;*
- *there is consultation within the workplace in relation to the control of employee's exposure to noise.*

Process description

Where a survey of an area, plant or process is conducted the following should be described:

- Area/plant/process surveyed eg "a survey of the area known as cold press or CP was conducted"
- Conditions at the time (ie personnel, process conditions, risk controls in place) eg "usual operator unavailable", "shutdown", "worst case situation, with no controls", "as normal, believed to be a representative working day", "only Blender No 2 was operating", "protective equipment worn other than overalls".
- Identity of any items examined eg "Toolmaster serial number 123", " machine called the hot block curer"
- Number of employees, duration of workshift(s) and, task frequency and duration eg "9 employees work an 8 hour day, 5 day week with 2 hours overtime worked infrequently", "it takes about 30 minutes for 5 bags to be opened and poured every day"

Methods and measurements

Where exposure or other measurements are conducted, the following should be included:

- *Sampling procedures, analytical procedures and relevant technical standard(s) followed. If a relevant published and validated method exists, it should be used in preference to a novel method. If it is necessary to use a novel method, a full explanation (including summary of validation) should be provided.*
- *Locations, times and duration of personal sampling and the names of the individuals concerned. If area/static sampling was also conducted similar details along with the reasons should be provided.*

eg for airborne contaminants "full shift personal sample", "partial shift area sample", "snap", "grab" "as short as practicable (ie 5 minute intervals) given analytical constraints"

eg for noise "full shift personal sample", "partial shift sample", "spot noise readings"

Exposure Standards

The exposure standards and their source should be detailed ie

Results and discussion

Results may be presented in the body of the report or as appendices. The level of information, considering the complexity of the processes, tasks and risks, should satisfy the technical reader but not unnecessarily complicate the report. Results should be traceable to the original field notes, this will allow verification of supporting data (eg identity of equipment used, calibration etc), should this be needed.

Results of personal sampling should be compared with the relevant exposure standard. If there is no relevant exposure standard, it will be necessary to either modify or adapt an existing guideline or develop a guideline. The rationale justifying the guideline used should be provided.

- eg for airborne contaminants
 - (a) time weighted average (TWA) & short term excursions limits (STEL), or
 - (b) TWA and general excursions limits (if no STEL is set), or
 - (c) peak/ceiling limits.

eg for noise exposure standard time weighted average (LAeq, 8) and peak noise level

Results should be compared with any previous surveys at the premises and data from similar premises if available eg *"...the process produced results that are similar to other coating operations"* An explanation of general trends and unusual high or low trends should be included.

Conclusions

Conclusions should be drawn about whether or not the relevant exposure standard(s) have been exceeded and if the work could harm employees health, eg *"Exposure is likely to approach and may exceed the exposure standard and there is a significant risk."*, *"It is believed that exposures are unlikely to approach the exposure standard and the risk is not significant."*, *"The risk is uncertain due to the state of knowledge (or level of exposure)"*

Conclusions should also be drawn about adequacy of control and any further practical actions to eliminate or reduce the assessed risk so far as is practicable eg *"existing controls adequate if maintained"....."existing controls not adequate and need to be upgraded"*

Recommendations

Recommendations needing to be taken should be selected using the hierarchy of control approach (personal protective equipment being the last resort) and guidance on an appropriate implementation time frame (eg urgent, short, medium or long term) should be provided. eg *"Temporarily cease work on No 123 process until corrective actions (see below) have been implemented"*, *"Personal protection is a short term interim control. In the longer term engineering controls..."*, *"A preventive maintenance program should be implemented as soon as practicable."*, *" Periodic reviews to determine if control measures need to be modified should occur at least once a year."*

Recommendations arising from regulatory requirements or similar guidelines should reference the relevant source document(s) eg *"The Victorian Occupational Health and Safety (Noise) Regulations 1992 require that..."*, *" Australian Standard 4114 Spray Painting Booths states that a minimum velocity of ..."*

Ideally your consultant should have discussed the recommendations with you either at the completion of the audit or when the results became available.