

Supervision and Work Health & Safety



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Abstract

Mark Gordon is the Principal Surveyor of the NSW Roads & Traffic Authority.

Through his involvement with the NSW Board of Surveying & Spatial Information and as convenor of its investigation committee, Mark has developed an interest in the level of supervision being provided by surveyors, particularly in respect to occupational health and safety of personnel in the field. Mark also has had the experience of being phoned by WorkCover on a Friday afternoon after their discovery of safety breaches by one of his field surveyors and being told “Thanks for your explanation – I’ll let you know on Monday whether I’m going to fine you or not”.

Mark’s presentation today is on the topic of Supervision and Work Health & Safety.

SUPERVISION AND WORK HEALTH & SAFETY

The responsibility of surveyors for work health and safety extends beyond the confines of the office to the field situation, even when the supervising surveyor is not on site at the time.

In July 2010, the NSW Board of Surveying and Spatial Information (BOSSI) issued its **Determination on the Supervision of Persons by Registered Surveyors** which stated, in part:

“The supervising surveyor is responsible for ensuring that the supervised person is aware of the importance of the surveyor’s role in ... ensuring that work is undertaken in a safe and responsible manner (OHS) and in accordance with other relevant legislation”

and

“A supervising surveyor ... is responsible for the health and safety at work of the supervised person. This is particularly relevant with respect to a supervised person in the field, even if the supervising surveyor is not present in the field with the supervised person (vide Section 8, Occupational Health & safety act 2000).”

BOSSI then emphasised this advice in its December 2010 release of the **Guide for Professional Conduct by Registered Surveyors**, which stated in part:

“Surveyors shall exercise care in the performance of their duties, including adherence to Occupational Health and Safety obligations and responsibilities”

and

“A surveyor shall exercise the required level of professional supervision in accordance with the BOSSI Determination on Supervision.”

If a serious accident occurs at work, it must be reported to WorkCover. This organisation will examine the circumstances behind the accident and determine if a breach of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000 or the associated Regulation has occurred. This could lead to prosecution and personal fines of \$55,000 for a first offence and \$82,500 or 2 years imprisonment for a repeat offender. If an accident results in a workplace death, a personal fine of \$165,000 or 5 years imprisonment, or both, could result.

To mitigate the risks of the occurrence of serious accidents, the supervising surveyor must put measures in place to ensure compliance with occupational health and safety procedures implemented by the organisation. In addition, the organisation needs to ensure itself that “safety first – work second” is being implemented across all facets of work. In particular:

- Supply adequate resources to mitigate OHS issues, such as Personal Protective Equipment.
- Provide appropriate training to staff and ensure staff possess the mandatory OHS General Induction (white) card as a minimum.
- Implement an OHS Management System, including policies and procedures, regular staff meetings, site inductions, Safe Work Method Statements (including annual review), field audits and the recording & monitoring of OHS failures and near misses.
- Encourage Staff to speak up and intervene when they see an act which they personally regard as unsafe and to report & document OHS system failures.

- Properly plan work and provide resources to minimise the risk of survey parties being placed in the position of making a ‘crunch’ decision at a worksite eg “*Do we delay the job to get the proper equipment/ resources or just go ahead with the additional risk?*”.
- Put measures in place to verify that field staff are complying with procedures (eg field audits).
- Personally comply with OHS rules and procedures: lead by example.
- Actively encourage staff to raise safety issues, including those relating to your own behaviour.

The presentation at today’s APAS conference details two occurrences which resulted in a failure of the OHS system to prevent injury to employees. The first demonstrates how minor breaches of the system can cascade into a catastrophic failure and emphasises that just because an OHS management system is in place does not mean that everyone is using it. The second occurrence details an accident that happened to a surveyor on site which led to prosecution by WorkCover and the implementation of more stringent OHS/WHM procedures by the employer.

Safety is everyone’s responsibility.