



## Fact Sheet

# Guidance for producing Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS)

### Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner (OFSC) Audits and SWMS

OFSC audits are conducted on companies seeking accreditation under the Australian Government Building and Construction OHS Accreditation Scheme (the Scheme) and on accredited companies to ensure they maintain the OHS standards required for accreditation.

The standards expected by our Federal Safety Officers (FSOs) are deliberately set at a high benchmark to ensure the safety of workers.

During these onsite audits, Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS) are one of the key pieces of documentation assessed.

SWMS are developed for activities undertaken by workers onsite which identify the hazards associated with a work activity. They assess the risk of these hazards occurring and outline the preventative controls to be put in place.

As SWMS form the primary source of documented OHS guidance for workers, it is essential that they are involved in its development and clearly understand the material.

Whilst some of the core information contained within a SWMS may be relevant across multiple projects, much of the information should relate to the specific situation on each project. As such, site specific SWMS should be developed for all projects.

### What is required in regards to SWMS?

The OFSC audit criteria specify SWMS responsibilities as they relate to the principal contractor for buildings works. These are covered in the following audit criteria:

- OH3.3 - Legal Requirements
- OH12 - Hazard Identification Risk Assessment and Control (HIRAC)
- SC3 - Whole of Project Consultation
- SC4 - Management of Subcontractor
- H1-19 - Hazard Audit Criteria

The detailed criteria used to conduct the audit are available at [fsc.gov.au](http://fsc.gov.au).

All SWMS must be reviewed by the principal contractor against defined criteria and approved prior to work commencing. This includes the SWMS of both direct employees and subcontractors who are operating on the particular project.

Where the principal contractor determines that amendments are required, a revision must be developed in consultation with workers. Once the new version is accepted by the principal contractor, all workers must be retrained before commencing any work.

### What sort of information should a suitable SWMS contain?

The OFSC does not prescribe the particular format in which a SWMS should be structured as this is a business decision for the company. However, all SWMS should adequately reflect the relevant scope of works associated with the particular work activity.

Generally each SWMS should address the elements outlined in the SWMS Elements Table.

### Other fact sheets in this series can be found at [fsc.gov.au](http://fsc.gov.au):

- Corrective actions and the auditing process
- Federal Safety Officers
- Powers of Federal Safety Officers
- Federal Safety Officer Code of Conduct
- OFSC Audit Criteria



## SWMS Elements Table

Employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>include full details about the employer such as organisation's name, ABN number, address, contact person</li> </ul>
Work activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>include a description of the activity / work being addressed by the SWMS etc</li> <li>consider project details and the principal contractor requirements for whom the SWMS has been developed and where applicable the location / area of work etc</li> </ul>
Plant and Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>include details of any plant and equipment that will be required to undertake the task</li> <li>this step will help ensure this equipment is considered when developing safety control measures</li> <li>it is also beneficial to consider including details of plant and equipment servicing, maintenance, inspection and cleaning activities that will be associated with the use of the plant and equipment although this could be addressed by other documentation. All servicing should be in accordance with the manufacturers requirements</li> </ul>
Competencies and Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>include details of specific competencies and training required to undertake the activity (or specific aspects of the activity) including licenses, qualifications, trade certificates etc</li> <li>it is also beneficial to consider recording the individuals license / certificate numbers etc associated with the specific competencies and training required on the SWMS, although this could be addressed by other documentation</li> </ul>
Health and safety Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the SWMS must incorporate controls that conform with the requirements of the specific health and safety legislation, codes, standards, OFSC audit criteria etc that are relevant to the activity</li> <li>to assist with this task, an allocated area on the SWMS should list the names of health and safety legislation, standards and codes etc that are relevant to the activity. This process can help ensure that relevant documents are considered when developing specific control measures and be used as a reference when updating SWMS following release of updated H&amp;S legislation, standards and codes etc</li> </ul>
Consultation during development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>workers or their nominated safety representatives must be involved in the development of site safety procedures including SWMS</li> <li>to ensure records of the relevant consultation are maintained many organisations include details on the SWMS of the consultation that occurred during the development including the names and positions of those involved. This could however be addressed by other documentation maintained with the SWMS rather than within the document itself</li> </ul>
Step by step sequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the activity must be broken up into a sequence of steps / tasks required to complete the work activity</li> </ul>
Hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>for each step / task associated with the overall activity the individual hazards must be identified</li> </ul>
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>each hazard must be risk assessed</li> <li>risks for each identified hazard must be assessed having regard to the likelihood and consequence of it occurring and available information on the hazard including any records of incidents, illness and disease</li> <li>to assist in the development of the SWMS the risk assessment process and a defined risk rating system should be included</li> <li>risk control priorities, having regard to the identified levels of risk must be determined</li> </ul>

Controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ appropriate control measures must be established for all identified hazards, in accordance with the hierarchy of controls</li> <li>▪ the SWMS must incorporate controls that conform with the relevant requirements including, but not limited to: the specific health and safety legislation; codes; standards; OFSC audit criteria; and principal contractors project risk assessment controls chosen for the project</li> <li>▪ details should be recorded to demonstrate that responsibility for implementing the controls has been allocated</li> <li>▪ some organisations find it beneficial to incorporate a record of chosen hierarchy of controls to help ensure it is considered when developing the controls. This is not however the only way of demonstrating that the hierarchy of controls has been used</li> </ul>
Evaluation & Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the hazard identification, risk assessment and risk control process needs to be subject to an evaluation of the effectiveness of the process</li> <li>▪ as part of this process it is not uncommon for organisations to record residual risk, however this is not the only way of demonstrating the effectiveness of controls is assessed. For example, onsite task observations are also a means for assessing control effectiveness</li> <li>▪ SWMS must be formally reviewed &amp; updated whenever: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a significant change to task or activity is identified</li> <li>▪ an incident occurs relating to the task or activity</li> <li>▪ a significant hazard is identified relating to the task or activity or</li> <li>▪ periodically as required</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ as part of this process some organizations find it beneficial for review and inspection details to be determined and recorded within an allocated area on the SWMS</li> </ul>
Emergency response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ in some situations the process of ensuring worker safety while undertaking the activity will necessitate that specific emergency procedures have been developed and are included within the SWMS</li> </ul>
Training Into SWMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the names and signatures of the workers trained to undertake the activities outlined in the SWMS should be recorded on the SWMS, along with details associated with the training. For example, the trainer/person conducting the SWMS induction and date of training</li> <li>▪ outcomes of any consultation that occurred during the training and any agreements made regarding the implementation of the SWMS etc should be documented and attached</li> <li>▪ records of any re-training of all relevant workers after changes have been made to the SWMS should be attached</li> </ul>
Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the names and positions of personnel assigned supervising responsibilities should be recorded on the SWMS</li> </ul>

### Ongoing evolution of SWMS

A number of Industry bodies are presently reviewing best practice with regards to the ongoing application of SWMS. As new approaches evolve, the OFSC will continue to evaluate its approach to SWMS. Any changes will be communicated to industry stakeholders, communicated on [fsc.gov.au](http://fsc.gov.au) and reflected in changes to this fact sheet.

### For further information you can:

- visit the FSC website at [fsc.gov.au](http://fsc.gov.au)
- contact the FSC Assist Line on **1800 652 500**
- contact the OFSC via email at [ofsc@deewr.gov.au](mailto:ofsc@deewr.gov.au)

This fact sheet is correct as of 3 March 2010. Produced by the Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner.

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