

Occupational Health and Safety

A major achievement during the year was the negotiation and finalisation of formal Health and Safety Management Arrangements (HSMA) for the Bureau in response to changes to the *Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act 2007*. The purpose of the HSMA, which set out the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) framework for the organisation, is to:

- enable effective cooperation in developing and promoting measures to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all persons at work;
- specify a dispute resolution mechanism to deal with disputes arising in the course of consultations held under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1991* between the Bureau and staff;
- specify the manner in which health and safety committees are to be constituted and operate; and
- detail mechanisms for informing Bureau staff, and reviewing and varying the arrangements in consultation with staff.

Activities commenced to reconstitute the function and roles of health and safety committees and Designated Work Groups in accordance with the new HSMA.

Other major OHS initiatives during 2008-09 included:

- follow-up on the recommendations of the major OHS audit undertaken by the Bureau's internal auditors, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, in 2007-08 and the implementation of appropriate remedies;
- research, development and presentation of strategic advice for the Bureau's response to threats posed by H1N1 Influenza;
- presentation of safety training sessions at Head Office and Regional conferences;
- follow-up and completion of rectification activities arising out of the OHS audit at the Cape Grim Baseline Air Pollution Station in Tasmania;
- facilitation of seasonal flu injections for Bureau staff, with a 30 per cent increase in uptake on the previous year;
- safety inspections undertaken for facilities at Broome and Perth Airport in Western Australia, and Battery Point and Maria Island in Tasmania; and
- a review and update of specifications for dangerous goods safety signs used at Bureau facilities.

The number of OHS incidents being reported has remained static and relatively low over the past few years. A rewrite of the policy covering incident management was completed and a trial of a simpler Incident/Hazard Report form was undertaken.

Risk assessments were conducted covering a broad range of situations with OHS implications including new plant and equipment, noise, manual handling tasks, storage of dangerous goods, new or upgraded facilities, working at height and diving. The resultant selection and implementation of control measures has reduced or eliminated many of the OHS-related risks faced by the organisation.

An investigation into potential employee exposure to dangerous goods (hydrogen-filled weather balloons) was finalised by Comcare during the year. The enquiry looked at many facets of balloon launching utilising hydrogen gases. Comcare's final investigation report reflected satisfaction with the Bureau's management actions and concluded that the matters were considered to be finalised.

The Bureau's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) continued to be used regularly throughout the reporting period by employees and their families to address a variety of work-based and outside-work problems. EAP awareness sessions were conducted in Head Office and in a number of Regional Offices on topics such as 'Change Management', 'Team Effectiveness and Relationships', 'Keeping the Balance' and 'EAP Awareness'. In February, following the Victorian bushfires, there was a critical incident debriefing in the Victoria Regional Office for managers and employees who may have been adversely affected by this event. There were four new EAP tip sheets made available for employees to access through the Bureau's intranet. The sheets covered a range of topics including 'A New Perspective on Christmas', 'A Survival Guide for Parents of VCE Students', 'Coping with the Trauma of Bushfires' and 'Supporting People in the Aftermath of Bushfires – Hints for Managers'. The EAP continued to be promoted via the intranet, as part of induction and training courses, and through EAP information advices. Employees and their families accessed the EAP service on topics such as welfare counselling, job-related coaching and career assistance. Managers continued to promote the service to their staff and made increasing use of the 'Manager Assist' component to enhance their management skills. During the reporting period, EAP Provider contract extensions were finalised in Victoria and Western Australia.

The Bureau's workers' compensation premium rate for 2008-09 was set at 0.54 per cent of payroll, reduced from 0.61 per cent in 2007-08, and as compared with 1.36 per cent for the Commonwealth overall. There were 13 new compensation claims received during the reporting period compared with 11 in the previous year, with an increase in the average cost of claims. Lost time averaged 0.10 weeks this year compared with the previous average of 0.03 weeks. Compensation claims continued to be predominantly for body stressing injuries such as ankle injury, tendonitis of neck, shoulder, wrist, and lower back injury. The average cost of the new claims increased from \$3,866 in 2007-08 to \$6,303 in 2008-09. The total cost of claims increased from \$42,529 last year to \$81,943 this year.