Summary Report: How Safe is TAFE? Accident Prevention Strategies for TAFE Institutions

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INTRODUCTION

With the introduction of new occupational health and safety legislation in Australia, it is becoming increasingly important for TAFE to address the issue of optimising resources so as to provide staff and students with the highest possible level of protection against occupational injury and disease.

TAFE, like other large organisations, has tended to focus on day to day health and safety issues or used a broad brush approach rather than commit resources to the long term development of specific programmes. With the stringent limitations being imposed on expenditure it has become essential to develop occupational health and safety strategies that are directed at the areas of greatest need.

This project investigates the causes of occupational injury to TAFE personnel and recommends appropriate strategies so as to target areas in the TAFE system in greatest need of occupational health and safety intervention.

AIMS

The aim of this project is to investigate the causes of occupational injury to TAFE personnel and recommend appropriate intervention strategies so as to optimise TAFE occupational health and safety resources.
In particular the research seeks to:

(a) target areas in the TAFE system in greatest need of occupational health and safety intervention; and

(b) recommend specific occupational health and safety intervention strategies;

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the aims of this project two distinct approaches were taken. These approaches consisted of:

(a) analysis and examination of compensation claim data
(b) interviews with health and safety personnel, internal and external to the TAFE environment.

1. COLLECTION OF ACCIDENT DATA

Compensation claim data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) was obtained for the determination of injury causation. The ABS provided raw data for the State of Western Australia and published data for other States and Territories. The ABS tried to provide raw data for other States and Territories, however after lengthy negotiations obtaining permission from relevant State bodies proved to be prohibitively difficult.

The raw data was provided on magnetic storage tape for analysis using the SAS statistical package (SAS Inc). A total of five years (1981-1985 financial years) of data was provided allowing analysis to be carried out on all workers covered by the W.A. Workers' Compensation and Assistance Act 1981 for this period.
The statistics relate to all industrial accidents involving time lost from work of one day or more. Accidents resulting in the death of, or injury to, self-employed persons and persons employed by the Commonwealth Government are not covered. Occupational illness data is not provided either since this information is thought to be inaccurate.

Reports relating to accident claims are forwarded to the ABS by the W.A. Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Commission which obtains the information from insurers and self insurers under the authority of the Act. The accuracy of collection coverage is very difficult to control because of the diverse administrative systems maintained by the insurers. The data should be interpreted with the knowledge that inconsistencies in reporting occur, which may affect the validity and reliability of any statistical trends that become apparent. However the large size of the data will tend to minimise the effect of any minor inconsistencies.

The raw compensation claim data includes a number of distinct categories that allow accident analysis to be carried out for the determination of injury causation. The data variables include (a) occupation, (b) industry, (c) age, (d) sex, (e) duration of time lost, (f) date of accident; as well as the accident descriptors of (g) agency of accident, (h) type of accident, (i) type of injury and, (j) the bodily location of the injury.

2. ANALYSIS OF STATE ACCIDENT DATA

Raw data for the whole of Western Australia was analyzed to determine the frequencies associated with the broad accident
classification categories of agency and type of accident, type of injury and location of injury.

This initial analysis was conducted to indicate the trends in accident causation over the five year period between 1981 and 1985; and examine the similarities and differences between the Western Australian accident information and the data from other States. It should be noted that published data varied from State to State and therefore comparisons could not be made with all States. For instance, not all States provided accident agency data, or type of injury data. Also the reporting systems within the States and Territories vary for some record claims with time loss of one day or more (eg. Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania) as a threshold limit whereas others can have threshold limits of a number of days (5 days in South Australia and New South Wales, 3 days in Victoria).

The Western Australia data was further examined so as to obtain an understanding of the sequence of accident causation. Two way tables were established for (a) accident agent and accident type, (b) accident type and injury type, (c) accident agent and type of injury, (d) location of injury by type of injury, (e) time loss by location of injury.

3. ANALYSIS OF TAFE ACCIDENTS

Just as the raw data for the whole of Western Australia was analyzed, TAFE data was also analyzed to determine the frequencies of the broad accident classification categories of agency and type of accident, type of injury and location of injury.
The data was further examined so as to determine the demographic
nature of claimants within the TAFE environment, and hence to
optimise prevention strategies. This required the determination
of the personnel at greatest risk with regard to their
occupation, gender and age. To assist in the maximization of
accident prevention, the agency of accidents were re-examined in
greater detail so as to distinguish the predominant causative
accident agents.

4. INTERVIEWS OF HEALTH AND SAFETY PERSONNEL

Contact was established with TAFE occupational health and safety
personnel in each State and Territory. Requests were made to each
contact officer for the following information concerning their
respective TAFE environment:

a) Workers' compensation data giving details of:
   i) occupation of claimant
   ii) age of claimant
   iii) sex of claimant
   iv) date/time of accident
   v) type of injury
   vi) agency of accident
   vii) body location of injury
   viii) time lost in days

b) Data from accident report forms (requesting details as above).

In addition each contact person was interviewed by telephone to
obtain further accident and injury data and to discuss the
design, implementation and evaluation of intervention strategies.
A number of experts in the occupational health and safety field in government and industry within Western Australia were also interviewed using the same interview format as for TAFE safety personnel. They were questioned on their accident problems as well as prevention techniques and programmes, evaluation of these programmes, and general effectiveness of intervention strategies.

REPORTING THE FINDINGS

The report is presented in three parts:

i) Summary of compensation data;
ii) Summary of TAFE data; and
iii) Set of Appendices to assist in the establishment of accident prevention strategies. (Based upon the recommendations).

Upon the examination and analysis of accident data and the collation of interview data, recommendations are made about the TAFE environment. To assist in the implementation of the recommendations a set of preventive strategy guidelines have been provided. However the use of these guidelines will depend upon the needs and requirements of each TAFE institution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of interviews with TAFE health and safety personnel and the examination of accident data, a number of issues have been identified and as a result, the following six recommendations are offered:
1) POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

A sound, practical and feasible occupational health and safety policy should be developed and a total commitment from the TAFE executive be given, particularly in the provision of sufficient funding to adequately promote health and safety throughout TAFE.

2) STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff development programmes should be implemented for all personnel from the day they join TAFE. These programmes need to encompass the training of personnel as well as the promotion of health and safety within the workplace. Staff development should include an induction programme that sets out the requirements of the TAFE health and safety policy, and basic training in the area of health and safety.

Systematic staff development should be available with regular training programmes designed specifically for the needs of TAFE personnel within all sectors of the TAFE environment.

3) CLEANERS AND GARDENERS

Cleaners and gardeners are the occupational groups most likely to make a claim for compensation and therefore the sector responsible for the greatest outlay in compensation payments. To reduce the cost of premiums and other associated factors there is a need to develop a training programme specifically for these staff.

Adequate training and the provision of a safe working environment to this sector of the workforce should lead to an overall
reduction in the number of claims and a reduction in associated costs.

4) ACCIDENT REPORTING SYSTEM

TAFE institutions may need to upgrade their accident reporting system to ensure that all accidents are reported and regularly analysed.

The accident reporting system should include:

i) An accident reporting form that seeks relevant and accurate information,

ii) Staff training to ensure that accidents are reported promptly and correctly,

iii) Facilities for the collection and storage of accident data for statistical analysis.

5) HAZARD AUDITS AND INVESTIGATIONS

Accidents should be investigated and a systematic programme of workplace inspections implemented.

6) GENERAL MAINTENANCE AND HOUSE KEEPING

Regular maintenance and a high standard of house-keeping within the TAFE environment is required to reduce hazards and can be expected to lead to a reduction in accidents.