HLC GROUP AUST

WORKPLACE RISK & TRAINING UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2026

THE CHRISTMAS RUSH: MEETING DEADLINES WITHOUT COMPROMISING SAFETY

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Planning for a safe finish to the year

As Christmas approaches, many businesses face the familiar pressure to complete projects, increase production, deliver services and meet customer expectations before the holiday break. At the same time, employers are preparing for closures, reduced trading and the impact these periods can have on cash flow.

These competing pressures can affect more than the bottom line. Rushed work, extended hours, uncertainty about income and poorly communicated shutdown arrangements can increase the likelihood of physical injury and psychosocial harm.

This November, our focus is on practical planning: realistic workloads, safe systems of work, clear communication and early decisions about shutdown arrangements. Finishing the year successfully should also mean everyone finishes it safely.

Founder & CEO | HLC Group Aust

01 Production pressures

02 Financial strain

03 Shutdown rules

04 Action checklist

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01 The year-end production and service rush

As customers seek completion before Christmas, businesses may add shifts, accept extra jobs or accelerate production. Higher output is not inherently unsafe, but work becomes riskier when the demands exceed the time, staffing, equipment or supervision available.

PHYSICAL INJURY RISKS

Fatigue, manual handling, repetitive tasks, vehicle movements, machinery use, shortcuts around isolation procedures and missed maintenance can contribute to incidents.

PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS

Unrealistic deadlines, excessive workload, low job control, unclear priorities and poor supervisor support may cause sustained stress and psychological or physical harm.

What good planning looks like

Set achievable deadlines

Review capacity before accepting additional work; negotiate delivery dates rather than relying on excessive overtime.

Keep critical controls intact

Maintain pre-start checks, competent supervision, equipment inspections, safe work procedures and suitable breaks.

Consult the workforce

Ask workers where bottlenecks, fatigue and unsafe shortcuts are emerging. Make it safe to raise concerns.

Monitor early warning signs

TEAM DISCUSSION

What work must be completed before Christmas, and what can safely wait until January?

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02 Cash flow, closures and worker wellbeing

Seasonal closures and shutdowns may mean reduced revenue while rent, insurance, loan repayments, wages and supplier costs continue. Delayed customer payments and year-end expenses can intensify the pressure on owners and managers.

Financial strain can also flow through to workers. Uncertainty about hours, leave balances, income and job security may increase stress, particularly when decisions are made late or communicated inconsistently.

THE RISK CONNECTION

Financial pressure can encourage understaffing, deferred maintenance, reduced training and accelerated work. These conditions can increase physical hazards while insecurity, excessive demands and poor communication increase psychosocial hazards.

Practical ways to reduce the pressure

Forecast the closure period

Map expected receipts, fixed expenses, payroll, supplier commitments and the first weeks of reopening.

Communicate early and respectfully

Explain proposed closure dates, leave arrangements, payment timing and who workers can contact with questions.

Avoid transferring financial pressure to staff

Do not rely on unsafe productivity targets, unpaid extra work or pressure to skip breaks.

Protect essential safety spending

Prioritise maintenance, adequate supervision, safe staffing and legally required training and controls.

A QUESTION FOR BUSINESS LEADERS

If revenue slows for two weeks, which operating decisions might create new safety risks, and how will we prevent them?

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03 Christmas shutdowns: know the rules

A planned Christmas or New Year shutdown is not the same as a stand down. Employers should check the applicable modern award, enterprise agreement and employment arrangements before notifying workers or directing annual leave.

IMPORTANT: THERE IS NO UNIVERSAL 28-DAY RULE

Many modern awards require at least 28 days written notice of a shutdown, but requirements differ. Some agreements have different timeframes or conditions. Check the specific instrument before relying on a notice period.

A practical employer checklist

1. Confirm coverage

Identify each worker’s award or enterprise agreement, or whether they are award/agreement-free.

2. Check the shutdown provision

Confirm whether a direction to take annual leave is permitted, whether it must be reasonable and the required notice period.

3. Provide clear written notice

Specify shutdown dates, expected return date and any proposed annual leave direction, following the applicable rules.

4. Review leave balances and pay

Check public holidays, insufficient accrued leave and any agreement for leave in advance or unpaid leave; do not assume unpaid leave can be imposed.

5. Plan for a safe closure and reopening

Confirm site security, plant isolation, contractor access, emergency contacts, staffing and restart inspections.

REMEMBER

Award/agreement-free employees may be required to take annual leave during a shutdown only where reasonable. A shutdown is not a general right to stand workers down without pay.

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04 Your November preparation checklist

Use this checklist in a leadership meeting, toolbox talk or planning discussion before the final weeks of the year.

WORKLOAD
Review confirmed work, available capacity and realistic delivery dates.

FATIGUE
Assess rosters, overtime, rest breaks and travel demands.

SAFE SYSTEMS
Check maintenance, inspections, supervision and critical controls.

PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS
Consult workers about demands, uncertainty, support and communication.

CASH FLOW
Forecast closure costs and January restart commitments.

SHUTDOWN NOTICE
Verify the applicable award or agreement and issue notices on time.

LEAVE & PAY
Check annual leave, public holidays and any insufficient balances.

REOPENING
Plan staffing, plant checks, induction and contractor arrangements.

A SAFER FINISH IS A BETTER FINISH

Plan early. Communicate clearly. Keep effective controls in place. Make sure your people can return safely in the new year.

HLC Group Aust provides general educational information, not legal or financial advice. Check the specific industrial instrument and your workplace circumstances.

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REFERENCES Official guidance and further reading

The following official resources support the information in this edition and provide further detail for employers and workers.

Fair Work Ombudsman | Direction to take annual leave during a shutdown

https://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/annual-leave/directing-an-employee-to-take-annual-leave/direction-to-take-annual-leave-during-a-shut-down

Fair Work Ombudsman | End-of-year holiday rules

https://www.fairwork.gov.au/newsroom/news/rules-and-entitlements-during-the-end-of-year-holiday-season

Fair Work Ombudsman | Stand downs

https://www.fairwork.gov.au/pay-and-wages/stand-downs

Safe Work Australia | Job demands

https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/mental-health/psychosocial-hazards/job-demands

Safe Work Australia | Psychosocial hazards

https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/mental-health/psychosocial-hazards

SafeWork NSW | Psychosocial hazards

https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/hazards-a-z/psychosocial-hazards

ABOUT THIS UPDATE

HLC Group Aust shares practical workplace risk and training information to support safer decision-making. This newsletter is general information and does not replace legal advice, risk assessment, worker consultation or compliance with applicable WHS and workplace relations laws.