

OHS AMENDMENT BILL

The OHS Amendment Bill and Finding Your Hazards

What is changing in South African occupational health and safety, and how to be ready.

We are continuing our discussions with executives and business leaders on the OHS Amendment Bill, both to make sense of what is changing and to support the honest assessment that proper hazard identification depends on. The direction of travel is now clear enough that preparing, rather than waiting, is the wise move.

The shift is from compliance as paperwork to compliance as practice.

Inspectors now carry enhanced powers, including on-the-spot administrative fines, and the definition of workplace danger has widened to include psychological harm, burnout and toxic culture.

THE NEW REALITY

Four pillars of the new OHS landscape

- **A management system, not a file.** Compliance now means a system that visibly functions: continuous risk identification, controls, monitoring and improvement, built into daily operations rather than a policy in a folder.
- **Psychological safety is a hazard too.** Workload, control, support, harassment, role clarity and change are now treated as material hazards to be identified, assessed and controlled.
- **Faster, direct enforcement.** Inspectors are increasingly empowered to issue administrative fines on inspection, with real financial consequences and no wait for lengthy criminal proceedings.
- **Part of a wider wave.** COIDA amendments, phased through 2026, expand compensable conditions to include mental health impairments and disease arising from psychosocial hazards.

THE PRACTICAL TEST

Are your systems inspection-ready?

An inspector will not simply read your policy document. They will test whether your organisation actually identifies hazards, assesses risk, implements controls and monitors what works. In practice, you should be able to show:

- A current hazard register covering all four categories: physical, ergonomic, chemical and biological, and psychological.
- Evidence of ongoing identification, not a one-time desktop exercise from years ago.
- Risk assessments specific to real work activities, updated as conditions change.
- Controls that are visible, functional and matched to the level of risk.
- Monitoring and review that show the system is actively managed.

The question is not whether your workplace has hazards. Every workplace does. It is whether you have found them, assessed them, and put controls in place.

THE UNDERESTIMATED HAZARD

Psychological safety: the risk most leaders miss

This is the category most often dismissed as a soft issue, and the one becoming most legally consequential. Psychosocial hazards are conditions of work design, organisation and culture that can cause psychological harm. The duty is to control those conditions, not to screen individuals for vulnerability.

Six recognised categories of psychosocial risk

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Job demands and workload. Excessive demands, unrealistic deadlines, high emotional load and no time to recover.• Social support. Inadequate support from managers and colleagues, poor relationships, isolation.• Role clarity and conflict. Unclear expectations, conflicting instructions, roles that shift without communication. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Job control and autonomy. Little say over how work is done, no participation in decisions, micromanagement.• Bullying, harassment and violence. Repeated unreasonable behaviour, harassment or aggression, creating direct employer liability.• Change management. Restructuring or new systems imposed without consultation, support or clear communication. |
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Burnout is now an occupational risk, not a personal failing. Recognised by the World Health Organization as the result of chronic, unmanaged workplace stress, and increasingly compensable under COIDA where workplace conditions caused or materially contributed to it. South African studies show burnout among female doctors exceeding global averages, and high distress among academic staff.

Harassment and toxic culture create direct liability. Duties and redress sit across the OHS Act, the Labour Relations Act, COIDA and the Employment Equity Act. Failing to prevent or address bullying exposes employers to claims and litigation.

An HR problem is managed; a safety hazard is controlled. Treating psychological harm as an individual matter rather than a condition of the work is itself the exposure. The law expects systematic identification, assessment and control.

Warning signs leaders often miss

By the time a claim is filed, the hazard has usually been visible for months. Watch for:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presenteeism: present but disengaged or unwell.• Silence in meetings and few questions raised.• Rising short-term sick leave.• Attrition spikes, especially among strong performers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More grievances and complaints.• Declining quality or visible exhaustion.• Cynicism, resistance and change fatigue.• Little innovation, and rising interpersonal conflict. |
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THE FRAMEWORK

Four fronts for honest hazard identification

Physical. Slips, trips and falls, struck-by and caught-in hazards, electrical risk, noise, vibration, temperature extremes and confined spaces.

Ergonomic. Repetitive motion, awkward or static postures, forceful exertion and poor workstation design. Slow to show, costly over time.

Chemical and biological. Toxic, corrosive, flammable or carcinogenic substances, dust and fumes, infectious agents and bloodborne pathogens, controlled through inventories, safety data sheets, exposure monitoring and PPE.

Psychological. The six categories above, assessed and controlled with the same rigour as the rest.

A STARTING TOOL

A first checklist for psychosocial hazards

A practical starting point for an honest conversation with your teams. If you cannot answer yes with confidence, you have found a hazard worth assessing.

Workload and control

- Workloads and hours are realistic
- Deadlines are reasonable and breaks are real
- People have genuine input into how work is done

Support and relationships

- Managers give regular support and feedback
- Team relationships are positive
- Isolated and remote staff are supported

Dignity at work

- A clear anti-bullying and harassment policy exists
- Reporting is safe and confidential
- Complaints are investigated promptly and fairly
- Managers are trained to act

Clarity, change and voice

- Roles and expectations are clear
- Change is explained, consulted and supported
- People can raise concerns and mistakes without fear
- Mental health or EAP support is visible and used

MAKING IT STICK

Building a continuous system

Hazard identification is not a one-time event. An effective system runs on regular inspections and psychosocial assessments, job safety analyses, near-miss and incident investigation, easy and trusted reporting channels, a living hazard register, honest management review, and real employee participation, because the people doing the work see the hazards first.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Preparing, not waiting

The direction is now clear. Organisations that build honest hazard identification now, including the psychological dimension, will be ready when an inspector arrives, and healthier and more productive in the meantime.

How Ignite Purpose helps

Our work focuses on the hazard most leaders find hardest to see and to fix: the psychological one. The ARISE Resilience Programme is CPD-accredited (#784753), evidence-based and assessable, with a measured 11.29-point gain on the CD-RISC 25 resilience scale and a 33% reduction in burnout across cohorts of doctors, nurses, executives and leaders.

Talk to us about an honest hazard assessment, or bringing this work to your teams.

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This briefing is general information on the evolving OHS landscape and is not legal advice. For obligations specific to your organisation, consult a qualified occupational health and safety or legal professional.