

August 2022

ELECTRIC VEHICLE FIRES

**Inadequate
Buddy System**

**Problem with
Verbal Advice**

**Sharing Motor
Vehicle
Information**

Safety Audits

**Join Our Monthly
Webinars**



What's new in August?

Welcome to the August Safety News.

Our team has been busy visiting sites around Australia. This month we discuss the hidden dangers in safety audits.

How do we manage the risk of electrical vehicle fires and what safety information manufacturers must now be share with vehicle maintainance and training providers.



Glecellie Castro visiting sites in the NT

Stay Safe!

Safety Webinar – 5th August 10am (New Date)

We invite you to join us at **10am on Friday 5th August** for our free monthly webinar to keep you up to date on workplace health and safety. Gary and the team present short informal sessions of only 20 to 30 minutes on topical issues and answer your questions.

Register [here](#)

Missed our last webinar? View them [here](#)

SAFETY ACTION TEAM



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Emergency Plans for Electrical Vehicle Fires

Whilst there are currently around 35,000 electric vehicles (EVs) in Australia, it is estimated this will rapidly grow to around 1.3 million over the next ten years.

Businesses need to plan for the special risks posed by these vehicles being used, parked, and charged by their employees. For example, do you charge EVs at your office? If so, what controls have you put in place to manage emergency risks posed by that operation?



There has been significant media attention regarding the risks posed by fires in EVs which typically arise from crashes, incorrect electrical connection, or damage to the battery. Note: that there have only been 252 reported fires in EVs to date worldwide, but this will likely increase 2,000-fold as electric vehicles become dominant in new sales and responding to electric vehicle fires requires a different approach to what we are used to.

Cause of Electric Vehicle Fires

It is not known what triggers most fires within electric vehicles, though the major identified cause is because of collisions/debris striking the battery. This damage then causes the battery to overheat and eventually burn, which then cascades throughout the whole battery pack.

Warning Signs and Progression of Incident

The early warning signs of stress or cascade within a battery pack are:

- Popping sounds, like a gunshot,
- Hiss and whistle sounds which is the gas venting,
- Cherry bubble-gum smell, and
- Projectiles being ejected (cell debris).

Fighting an EV Fire

Fighting electric vehicles fires can be particularly challenging. To successfully put out the fire you need to sufficiently cool the battery which typically enclosed in a protective case under the car floor.

There is also a significant risk of re-ignition, if the batteries aren't fully cooled, and/or secondary ignition sources are present. This difficulty means that it can take many hours for trained fire fighters to fight and correctly suppress an EV fire.

Workplaces looking to have EV charging or storage on their premises will need to ensure their emergency plans are updated to address identified risks e.g. adequacy of

water supply, disrupted access, and potential damage to surrounding facilities from a potential fire.

Main Problem is Not EV Passenger Cars



Electric scooter charging station fire

So far there has only been one fatality in Australia associated with an electric vehicle, which was an electric scooter.

Therefore, emergency services are currently more concerned about light EV scooters and bikes, as there are more of them, several which have lower quality standards than electric cars and many are being charged in homes, using sub-standard charging cables, significantly increasing the risk of a fire.

However, with the increase in use of all kinds of electric vehicles, workplaces need to have a clear policy on use, charging, parking, and storage of EVs on their property and ensure that there are proper risk and emergency controls established.

Audits -Uncovering Hidden Dangers

Whilst there is no specific regulation requiring safety audits, all businesses have a general duty to provide a safe workplace, and safety audits are an excellent method of demonstrating and testing this obligation.

A safety audit confirms appropriate systems are in place to identify and control health and safety risks, and whether they are widely understood and followed.

Safety audits:

- Provide information on the status of your safety program.
- Should provide clear practical recommendations for addressing identified deficiencies.
- Assist with continuous improvement.
- Contribute to satisfying due diligence for both managers and the organisation.



Conducting a safety inspection

What Standard to Use?

People ask us, "What standard should we use to assess our system?" Numerous options exist, including: AS/ ISO 45,001, AS4801, National Audit Tool, SafetyMap and company specific audit tools.

When deciding what tool to use, consider what your objectives are. For example, strict compliance, commercial advantage, contractual or customer requirements, or continual improvement of your system.

Be prepared to act on the corrective actions after each audit.

Regardless of which standard you decide to use, your system needs:

- All procedures documented and centrally filed e.g., master copy.
- Procedures communicated to all, and relevant personnel trained in their use.
- A process to manage changes; and
- Systems integrated into existing business practices in each department.
- Periodic reviews.

What is Safety Certification?

Safety certification audits are conducted by specialist auditors who assess compliance with all mandatory elements before issuing the certificate. These audits are conducted to set audit criteria (e.g., the ISO AS45,001), and the company must satisfy all key items to achieve certification.

Certification is a requirement for self-insured companies and some business ventures. However, certification audits will not necessarily assist your business in moving beyond the certification requirements as they are very prescriptive and rarely identify best practise.

Timing and Frequency of Audits:



Internal audits (conducted by your safety team) aim to assess effectiveness and adherence to your own systems. We recommend you conduct these annually.

External audits (usually conducted by an independent specialist) challenge existing standards and compliance and offer ideas for improved strategic direction and best practice. Independent audits are recommended every 3 to 5 years based on your business risk level.

An audit program may include one or more reviews, depending on the size and complexity of the organisation and chosen scope. A full certification audit typically takes over a week or more whilst sampling compliance of your systems and your key needs can typically be completed in a single day for one site.

Where your company has various sites, you will need to schedule audits to assess each location, over an appropriate period of time, ensuring that you obtain a good representative sample of sites, annually.

What to Look for in an Auditor

Auditor's essential skills include:

- Thorough comprehensive knowledge for applicable legislation and standards, including the required audit tool.
- Diplomatic and able to communicate with people in various positions, circumstances, and situations.
- Adaptable and flexible to working in a way which suits your business, and any changes that may occur.

Safety Action team are highly experienced in independent audit programs and can help if desired. Call 03 8544 4300 or [email](#).

New Law on Sharing Critical Safety Information for New Motor Vehicles

A new law has been introduced by the Australian Government, the *Competition and Consumer (Motor Vehicle Service and Repair Information Sharing Scheme) Rules 2021*, which mandates that all diagnostic, service, and repair information, provided to car dealerships and manufacturer preferred repairers, be made available for Australian repairers and Registered Training Organizations (RTOs) to purchase.



The purpose of this legislation is to ensure that there is a process for specified Australian businesses to access critical safety information on Hydrogen systems, high voltage systems, electrical propulsion systems, and systems which interconnect with those components to allow those businesses to safely perform repair and maintenance work on those systems or develop training programs to instruct people on how to safely perform those works.

The law outlines who is obligated to provide information for specified businesses (defined within the law) to purchase this information at a fair market value.

This law is similar to when the government mandated that organisations provide safety data sheets for their dangerous goods and hazardous substances e.g., the need for information to allow people to perform their work safely overrules intellectual property (IP) rights with these laws.

The law came into effect on the 1st of July 2022, as part of the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010*, with more information available [here](#) or by contacting contact AASRA or ACCC.

Inadequate Buddy System



Many businesses use a buddy system to induct and train new workers. Two companies were recently prosecuted when a worker was injured and found to have been given inadequate training and supervision after relying on a buddy system.

A labour hire worker was contracted to a business to help operate a conveyor system. He was given a buddy to teach him the local work practices.

This is a common method of training and supervision and used in many companies. But in this case one of his buddies thought it was safe to remove the build-up on the conveyor while it was still operating. The worker then used a shovel to clear a build-up, which got caught in the running rollers which resulted in serious shoulder injuries.

The Court found that the business failed to properly train and supervise workers, while the labour hire company failed to determine the nature of the work its employee would be doing at the factory, or check whether the host business had properly trained him.

This case emphasises the need for businesses to better understand who can train (or buddy) others within their organisation and what competency testing and monitoring they need to perform on these workers. For labour hire companies, this means that procedures need to be in place to check that your employees are receiving appropriate and adequate training at host sites.



If you are unsure about your supervision or training, give us a call.

Can't Rely on Verbal Advice

Often, when we visit a work site and see a potential hazard, our clients tell us that WorkSafe (or another authority body) has visited the site recently and didn't mention it or didn't advise it was unsafe. A recent case has confirmed this is insufficient evidence to declare an area, machine, or task as safe.

A case ruling (Gerald Brennan v Capital Weed Control Pty Ltd and Anor,) has confirmed that companies cannot rely on the verbal advice of any official or authority representative.

It is the employer's duty of care to ensure the safety of work, and this cannot be delegated to others. At all times it remains the employer's duty to take precautions to ensure workplace safety, such as audits, risk assessments and inspections, even if a regulatory official has visited and suggested the task is ok.

It is important to remember that an official's role is to sample compliance, not conduct a thorough audit of your business. The ability to make decisions on your business will always remain with the employer.

Positive Feedback is Enormously Powerful

A Finnish study* confirmed the relationship between poor work performance and absenteeism, and a caring attitude from managers and co-workers.

Some of the key findings of the study include:

- Employee's perception about the level of interest and concern for their wellbeing affected work sickness and accident rates.
- Good team climate, positive feedback and no bullying decreased the risk.
- Shift work, monotony and crowded work areas increase rates of absenteeism
- Good communication at work was associated with a lower risk of accidents.
- Improved performance depends more on physical factors (such as clear work tasks and efficient set up) and positive feedback.
- Prevention of poor work depends more on job security and feelings of appreciation and value.
- Absenteeism and productivity can be improved by positive interventions, such as creating a supportive team culture.

The lower likelihood of workplace absences and accidents can be predicted by the presence of a supportive team culture."

These principles and many more are included in the practical Safety Leadership Training conducted by Safety Action.



* Source: *Psychosocial Work Factors and Sick Leave, Occupational Accident and Disability Pension*. Katariina Hinkka, et al, Finland, *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, Vol. 55, Issue 2, February 2013.