

Types of WHS Documentation & How They Work

A practical overview of the documents that keep a business compliant, audit-ready and protected on real sites.

Why WHS Documentation Matters

Workplace health and safety documentation is often treated as a compliance chore — something completed to satisfy a checklist rather than something that actually protects people. In practice, good WHS documentation does three things at once: it forces the thinking that identifies risk before it becomes an incident, it creates a record that can be produced under audit or regulator scrutiny, and it gives every person on site a clear, consistent reference for how work is meant to be done.

The documents below are the core building blocks of a WHS system. None of them work well in isolation — each depends on the others being current, consistent and actually used on site, not just filed away.

The Core Document Types

SAFE WORK METHOD STATEMENTS (SWMS)

A SWMS sets out the high-risk work being performed, the hazards involved, and the specific control measures in place to manage them. It is task-specific rather than site-wide, and is typically required before high-risk construction work begins. A SWMS is only as useful as its accuracy — a generic or outdated SWMS that doesn't reflect the actual task being performed offers little real protection and can itself become a compliance gap.

RISK ASSESSMENTS

A risk assessment identifies hazards across a site, task or activity, evaluates the likelihood and consequence of harm, and determines what controls are needed to reduce that risk to an acceptable level. Risk assessments sit upstream of most other WHS documentation — SWMS, management plans and procedures are all built from the hazards a risk assessment identifies.

WHS MANAGEMENT PLANS

A WHS management plan sets out how safety will be managed across an entire project or site, rather than a single task. It typically covers roles and responsibilities, consultation arrangements, emergency procedures, and how site-specific risks will be controlled and monitored over the life of the project. Where a SWMS answers "how do we do this task safely," a management plan answers "how do we manage safety across this whole project."

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Policies set out an organisation's overarching commitments and obligations — for example, a WHS policy statement signed by leadership. Procedures translate those commitments into repeatable, step-by-step processes for specific activities, such as incident reporting, plant isolation, or contractor induction. Policies tend to be stable over time; procedures are reviewed and updated more frequently as operations change.

SITE INDUCTIONS AND TRAINING RECORDS

Induction records confirm that a worker has been briefed on site-specific hazards, emergency procedures and expectations before starting work. Training records track the qualifications, licences and competencies held by each worker, and when they expire. Together, these two record types answer a simple but critical audit question: can you demonstrate that everyone on site was authorised and prepared to be there?

INCIDENT AND HAZARD REPORTS

An incident report documents what happened when something went wrong — an injury, a near miss, or a dangerous occurrence — along with the immediate response. A hazard report captures a risk identified before it causes harm. Both feed into root cause analysis and corrective action tracking, which is what actually prevents recurrence rather than simply recording that something occurred.

INSPECTION AND AUDIT CHECKLISTS

Inspection checklists provide a structured, repeatable way to check that controls identified in risk assessments and management plans are actually in place and functioning on site. Audit checklists go a step further, benchmarking a system against a formal standard — such as a regulatory requirement or an ISO management system standard — rather than just a site-specific control.

CONTRACTOR AND SUBCONTRACTOR COMPLIANCE REGISTERS

A compliance register tracks the licences, insurances, inductions and certifications held by every contractor and subcontractor engaged on a project, along with expiry dates. A well-maintained register means a lapse in a subcontractor's insurance or licence is identified and addressed before it becomes a genuine compliance gap — not discovered after the fact during an audit or, worse, an incident.

How These Documents Work Together

On a well-run site, these documents form a continuous cycle rather than a set of separate obligations:

- Risk is identified through a risk assessment.
- That risk informs task-specific controls in a SWMS, and project-wide controls in a WHS management plan.
- Policies and procedures set the standards those documents must meet.
- Inductions and training confirm the people on site are prepared to work within those controls.
- Inspections and audits verify the controls are actually being followed in practice.
- Incident and hazard reports capture what happens when something falls outside those controls, feeding back into a review of the original risk assessment.

A gap in any one of these — an outdated SWMS, an expired subcontractor licence, an inspection that never happened — weakens the whole system, even if every other document is in perfect order. This is why WHS documentation is best managed as a live, ongoing system rather than a one-off exercise completed at project start.

Where KLB Fits In

HOW WE SUPPORT THIS

KLB Consulting Group builds and maintains WHS documentation as an embedded part of your business, not a one-off deliverable. Our team develops SWMS, risk assessments and management plans tailored to your actual sites, manages contractor compliance registers, and conducts the audits and inspections that keep every document in this guide current, consistent and genuinely audit-ready.

If you'd like to discuss this with our team, get in touch for a consultation.