

## OHS research and education in Australia – the view from inside



Tim Driscoll  
School of Public Health  
University of Sydney

## Aims

Focus on research and education

Past versus present

Opportunities and challenges

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## Outline

- History
- ASCC versus NOHSC
- What has been lost?
- Reasons for optimism
- Challenges
- Does it matter?
- Conclusions

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## History

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## The “bad” old days

- No national OHS body
- Prescriptive legislation
- Out-dated legislation
- Low profile for OHS



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## 1970's: Robens and responsibility

1972: Robens report released

Onus on employer to provide a safe working environment

Self-regulation

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## 1980s: expansion and idealism

- Introduction of Roben's style legislation in Australia
- Establishment of National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC)
- Establishment of National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (NIOHS)
- Establishment of Australian College of Occupational Medicine (ACOM)
- Widespread use of corporate occupational physicians
- Increased size of trained OHS workforce

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## NOHSC



NOHSC CEO was an occupational physician  
Director of NIOHS was an occupational physician



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## National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety

- Occupational medicine
- Epidemiology
- Occupational hygiene
- Occupational toxicology
- Ergonomics
- Human factors
- Statistics
- Education

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## National Institute Research

- Fire fighters (hot work)
- Coal-workers' pneumoconiosis
- Mesothelioma
- Work-related fatal injury
- Vibration
- Serum bile acids
- Human error
- Competency-based training and assessment

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## 1990s: 'out-sourcing' and core business

- Decreased inspection and enforcement
- Self-regulation
- Decreased support for "basic" OHS research
- Effective closure of NIOHS
- Loss of company occupational physicians
- Loss of support for direct government involvement in research and education

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## 2000 – 2006: transition

- 2000: NOHSC moved to Canberra
- 2005: ASCC established
- Increasing self-employment
- Increasing individual employment arrangements
- Decreasing union influence



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## ASCC versus NOHSC

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## ASCC vs NOHSC

### ASCC

Within DEWR  
Tripartite  
Advisory  
Perception of lack of independence  
Limited in-house research

Perception of improved ability to influence decision-making  
Improving in-house OHS capability

### NOHSC

Separate authority  
Tripartite  
"Decision-making"  
Perception of independence  
National research institute

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## ASCC key activities

- Lead and coordinate national efforts to prevent workplace death, injury and disease; and to improve workers' compensation arrangements, and the rehabilitation and return to work of injured workers
- Provide a national forum by which representatives of State and Territory governments, employers and employees consult and participate in the development of policies relating to OHS and workers' compensation matters
- To promote national consistency in the OHS and workers' compensation regulatory framework

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## Role of the ASCC

- Setting national standards and encouraging consistent application of these standards by all State and Territory Governments
- Improving awareness of OHS through a national communication strategy and specific projects
- Improving understanding of OHS performance through detailed analysis of a wide range of data and research, from Australia and overseas
- Working with specific industry sectors, to identify strategies to improve OHS performance

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## What has been lost?

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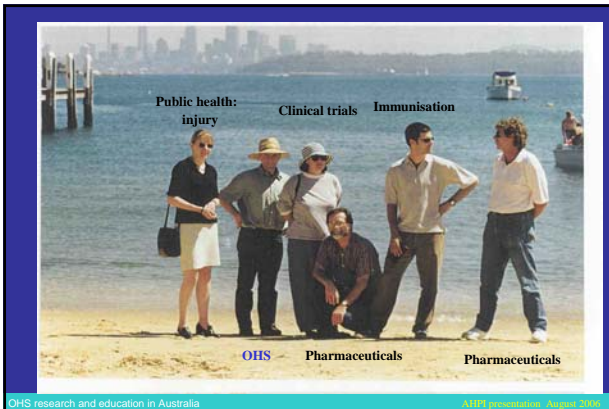
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## What has been lost?

- Loss of research expertise
- Loss of occupational medicine expertise
- Loss of OHS education expertise
- Loss of corporate knowledge
- Loss of OHS education opportunities
- Loss of research funding

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### Loss of expertise

<p><b>Occupational hygiene</b></p> <p>Tony Findlay      Retired</p> <p>Gary Foster      Consultant</p> <p>Cheryl Murdoch      Teacher</p> <p>Alan Rogers      Consultant</p>	<p><b>Occupational toxicology</b></p> <p>Neill Stacey      Pharmaceuticals</p> <p>Tony Bonin      University (chemistry)</p> <p>Chris Winder      UNSW</p>
<p><b>Epidemiology</b></p> <p>Tim Driscoll      U. Syd / consultant</p> <p>Sandra Healey      Clinical trials</p> <p>Leigh Hendrie      Pharmaceuticals</p> <p>Brynley Hull      Immunisation</p> <p>Jim Leigh      Retired (U. Syd)</p> <p>John Mandryk      Pharmaceuticals</p> <p>Rebecca Mitchell      Public health (injury)</p>	<p><b>Ergonomics</b></p> <p>Christine Aitken      Consultant</p> <p>Nick Coleman      Consultant</p> <p>Max Hely      Consultant</p> <p>Airdree Long      Consultant</p> <p>Marcia Lusted      Consultant</p> <p>Barbara McPhee      Consultant</p> <p>Pepe Marlow      UTS / consultant</p> <p>Sharon Phillips      Consultant</p>
<p><b>Occupational medicine</b></p> <p>Grahaeme Budd      Retired</p> <p>John Brotherhood      Retired (U. Syd)</p> <p>Gary Baker      General physician</p>	<p><b>Human factors</b></p> <p>Anne-marie Feyer      Consultant</p> <p>Ann Williamson      UNSW (injury)</p>

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## Loss of corporate knowledge

- When NOHSC moved from Sydney to Canberra, only nine (out of over 100 staff) moved - none of the members of the Epidemiology Unit moved.
- The last medical officer at WorkCover NSW left in 2005.

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## Loss of occupational medicine expertise in decision-making bodies

- The last medical officer at Work-Cover NSW left in 2005
- There are no occupational physicians employed in the ASCC

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## Loss of OHS education expertise

MOHS closed at the University of Sydney in 1996

Closure of University of Sydney Department of OHS

Loss of OHS teaching staff to other areas

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## Reasons for optimism

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## Reasons for optimism - research

- Willingness of government to support research focussed directly on policy development.
- Improved recognition in NHMRC of importance of public health (?occupational health) research.
- Improved recognition of government to base policy on evidence.
- Better data sources

OHS research and education in Australia [NHMRC presentation August 2006](#)

## ASCC-supported research

- OHS Cochrane collaborations
- Design issues in serious work-related injury
- Nanotechnology and OHS
- Fatigue and short haul trucking sector
- Exposure surveillance
- Funding support for Regnet
- National OHS conference in 2007

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## Reasons for optimism - education

- OHS taught in many Universities at TAFE, under-graduate and post-graduate level
- OHS being incorporated into other degrees (e.g. engineering)

OHS research and education in Australia [NHMRC presentation August 2006](#)

The screenshot shows the website for the School of Safety Science at the University of New South Wales. The main heading is 'HEALTH AND SAFETY'. Below it, there is a section for 'Program Authority: Associate Professor Chris Winder'. A large graphic on the right features a 'DANGER' sign and the text 'DEMOLITION WORK IN PROGRESS'. The page lists various graduate programs in health and safety.

The screenshot shows the Monash University website for the 'Master of Occupational and Environmental Health'. The page includes a navigation menu, a search bar, and detailed information about the program, including its course code (2212), credit points, and a list of study units. It also mentions the program's focus on preventing and managing occupational health problems.

The screenshot shows the Curtin University School of Public Health website for the 'Occupational Health and Safety' program. It provides a detailed description of the program, highlighting its focus on preventing occupational injuries and diseases. The page lists various degrees and certificates offered, such as the Bachelor of Science (Health and Safety) and the Graduate Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety Management.

Program information - 2006

UNSW

Program Information Search

**WebAdvisor™ Alert**  
 Wednesday, 30 August 2006 10:15, Database Maintenance. Many services unavailable between 5:15 PM and 7:15 PM.

**Master of Occupational Health and Safety**  
 2005 - 2006 | 2007  
 Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences | School of Psychology

**Program Code:** 0401  
**Program Level:** Postgraduate  
**SATAC code:** External Study  
**Home Country:** 1st Year  
**Program Length:** 0.5 Years

**Program directors**  
 • Dr Matthew Thomas (MCHS)

**Announcement**  
 Details about the program structure and courses can be found at the OHS program website.

**Aim**  
 To provide completion of health and safety practitioners in the practical management of health and safety issues by learning to resolve problems and apply appropriate scientific solutions.

**Entry requirements**  
 A relevant first degree or higher qualification from a recognised higher educational institution, together with a minimum of three years of relevant practical experience is required.

For international applicants for whom English is a second language, the minimum English language requirements are those which are standard within the Division and are outlined as follows:

- International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test - a minimum score of 6.0 in Reading and Writing sub scores and a minimum overall score of 6.5
- Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) - a minimum score of 55 (25 in the computer based test in Reading and Speaking/Writing sub scores and a minimum overall score of 575 (22/23

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**Master of Occupational Safety, Health and Environmental Management**

**UWS Course Code:** 3005.1

**Course Status:** CURRENT  
 This version of the course is available to new and continuing students.


This course aims to provide students with high-level professional skills in integrating approaches to occupational safety, health and environmental management that are essential for sustainable development. Students will develop the skills necessary for the development and implementation of integrated occupational environment management plans, as well as situation assessment, change evaluation and professional research.

**Study Mode**  
 One year full-time (or mid-year entry), and two years part-time, but due to the professional nature of the program most students will study part-time. Delivery will be external, by flexible learning, written study packages, WebCT and compulsory workshop attendance. The workshop components will be delivered on Humebury campus.

**Head of Program**  
**Name** **Email**  
 Debra Moulde-Bain | dmouldebain@uws.edu.au

**Location**  
**Campus** **Attendance Mode** **Course Advisor**  
 Humebury Campus | Full Time | External | Debra Moulde-Bain

**Reasons for pessimism**



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**Challenges**

- Collaborative OHS network
- Translation of research into practice
- Evaluation of intervention initiatives
- Gaining funding from NHMRC, ARC, etc
- Critical mass of researchers and educators
- Self-employed and individual employment arrangements
- Lack of public profile of OHS?
- Supporting regional OHS

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**Does it matter?**

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**Media Statement**

Westarhe 1360 Hay Street West Perth WA - P.O. Box 214 West Perth WA 4872  
 Telephone (08) 927 4777 - Facsimile (08) 927 4973 - (TTY) (08) 927 4838  
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November 16, 2005

**DEMOLITION COMPANY FINED FOR UNSAFE WORKPLACES**

A Malaga demolition company has been fined \$30,000 for failing to provide a safe workplace for its employees.

Murphy Demolition was convicted in the Magistrate's Court of WA Perth of failing to provide and maintain a safe workplace, and by that failure, causing a serious harm to an employee after a young worker was left paralysed.

Company directors Patrick and Daniel Murphy were also convicted over the same offence and fined \$5000 each.

In November 2003, the company was demolishing a building in Kalamunda using an excavator with a bucket fitting attached.

The excavator was fitted with a "quick hitch" that allowed various attachments to be attached to the boom of the excavator. The quick hitch included a safety pin secured by a short chain to ensure attachments do not fall on.

Prior to the day of the incident, one of the accused directors cut the pin off the quick hitch to make it easier and quicker to change the attachments.

The bucket was swung around it detached from the excavator, flying through the air and striking an 18 year old employee who subsequently severed his spinal cord. The employee is now paralysed from the mid-chest down.

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Department of Consumer and Employment Protection  
 Government of Western Australia

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August 30, 2005

**FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH WORKSAFE NOTICE LEADS TO FINES**

A Bickley orchardist was convicted last week of failing to comply with a WorkSafe Improvement Notice that directed him to fit rollover protection structures (ROPS) and seatbelts to his tractor.

Orchardist was fined \$2500 in the Magistrate's Court of WA Midland.

An improvement notice was issued to Mr Altizer when a WorkSafe inspector visited his orchard and found that the tractors used there did not have rollover protection structures and that there was a risk of them overturning.

Mr Altizer applied for a review of the notice, and after the WorkSafe WA Commissioner visited the orchard, the notice was affirmed and the compliance date extended.

Mr Altizer then applied for a further review of the notice through the Safety and Health Magistrate, and the notice was once again affirmed and the compliance date extended.

Two months after this compliance date, WorkSafe inspectors visited the orchard and found that the required actions had still not been taken.

Although one tractor on the property had been fitted with a ROPS, the other two had

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**Queensland Cancer Fund**

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Media - Study finds 5000 Australians develop cancer at work

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**Study finds 5000 Australians develop cancer at work**

Every day 1.5 million Australians are exposed to carcinogens at work and about 5000 people a year develop some form of cancer due to occupation.

A study by the Queensland Cancer Fund, published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, found the rate of occupational cancer in Australia was much higher than the 2 per cent generally accepted in the past.

The study was a joint collaboration with the University of Sydney and found one in 10 male workers and one in 50 female workers developed cancer every year due to workplace exposure to carcinogens.

Lung cancer was one of the cancers most often caused by occupation, affecting heavy industry workers exposed to airborne chemical particles and hospital workers exposed to passive cigarette smoke.

The Queensland Cancer Fund's Associate Professor Lin Fritsch posted to the lack of research in the area of occupational health as a serious failure.

"People are not particularly interested in occupation as the cause of cancer," Dr Fritsch said.

"There are thousands of chemicals being used in industry today, and most of them have not been evaluated properly."

"In addition, most people exposed to carcinogens in the workplace don't develop cancer until much later in life.

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**Conclusions**

- The approach to OHS in Australia has definitely improved over the last three decades.
- The ability to tackle OHS issues is probably worse now than 15 years ago due to a number of factors related to funding, a suitably qualified workforce, institutional support and focus on individual.
- There are opportunities for improvement, which is particularly likely to come through collaboration between researchers, educators, government, workers and industry.

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