

NSW mining and extractives industry

What is fitness for work?

Clauses 43 & 44 of the Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Regulation 2014, requires persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) to control risks associated with fatigue and drugs and alcohol. This is covered under the heading 'fitness for work'.

There are other workplace environment and individual factors affecting fitness for work that should be addressed in a health control plan.

Work factors such as hours of work and sleep opportunity, extremes of temperature, moisture content of the air also affect 'fitness for work'. A worker's fitness for work may also be affected by personal health and physical fitness.

In legal terms 'fitness for work' means that a person is in a physical and psychological state that enables them to perform their work tasks competently and in a manner which does not affect their health, safety or wellbeing, or that of others (Poteri, 2012).

A worker who is deemed fit for work is in a physical and psychological condition to meet their health, safety and work obligations competently.

What is the pathway to determine the effectiveness of controls for fitness for work?

As outlined previously, controls should be selected using the hierarchy of controls. The hierarchy ranks the effectiveness of controls from the highest level of protection and reliability (most effective) to the lowest (least effective).

Determining effective controls with regards to fitness for work can be challenging, nevertheless it can be achieved by using the following steps.

Step 1: Fit for work policy Fitness for work should be included in the overall work health and safety policy and should ensure commitment to health safety and wellbeing.

Step 2: Obligations Clearly state obligations on both managers and the workers within the safety management system for fitness for work. This includes how to identify when someone is unfit to work and individual obligations to report and identify fitness for work hazards.

Effective controls to ensure fitness for work

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Step 3: What is fit for work?

Clearly define what fit for work is in the context of the type of work being undertaken e.g. hours of sleep between shifts, absence of health conditions such as heart condition for work in hot areas.

Step 4: Understand risks

Define the jobs or tasks and identify the inherent risks of the job that may interact with fitness for work e.g. operating vehicles for 10 hours may pose risks due to fatigue or working in hot environments may cause heat stress and workers with reduced fitness are at more risk.

Step 5: Consultation

Talk to workers about their jobs/work areas and impacts on health e.g. musculoskeletal pain, heat stress, fatigue (alertness).

Step 6: Risk assessment and control

Conduct a risk assessment to eliminate or reduce the risks to health or safety of workers doing the work (refer to tools and resources). This should cover fitness for work issues that may compromise safety and work demands/environments which may affect fitness for work.

Select the best controls (refer to tools and resources).

Step 7: Communication

The fit-for-work management process should be clearly communicated with all people who are impacted by the process.

Step 8: Monitoring and review

The fit-for-work management process should also include how effectiveness of controls will be evaluated and reviewed.

