



Health and Safety for Mission Partners

Responsibilities under the
**HEALTH AND SAFETY
AT WORK ACT 2015**



THE NZ HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ACT 2015

is all about the assessment, management, elimination or minimisation of risks and hazards. Even when a mission partner is working in another country the commissioning church still has a care of duty under the act. This publication explores what this means and provides practical ways to help leadership meet its obligations.

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NZ Health and Safety at Work Act 2015

Anyone in New Zealand will know our Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (“HSWA”) has dramatically changed attitudes, awareness and practices in our workplaces and public areas. The HSWA applies to those who are employed or volunteer at our churches, as well as those who come onto the premises.

But what about the mission partners sent to some other place on the globe? Does church leadership have a duty of care to mission partners sent by the church to minister cross-culturally in another country under the HSWA?

Legal advice we have obtained states a church commissioning a mission partner is a PCBU (a person conducting a business or undertaking) under the HSWA. “With this comes obligations for the church to assess, manage and eliminate or minimise risks and hazards that a missionary may encounter in the foreign country they are going to.”

SO, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR LEADERSHIP GROUPS OF CHURCHES?

If the mission partner serves under the auspices of a mission agency, then that agency might be

the PCBU. It could be that church HSWA obligations are lessened but investigations need to be made to be certain that this is so, that the mission agency has the ‘control and influence’, not the church. If the mission partner has no mission agency connection, then the sending church leadership is the PCBU. Churches cannot insure against potential claims for non-compliance with the HSWA. This includes the costs of any action brought and fines imposed by the Department of Labour.

In this resource, we provide some practical ways to help leadership meet its obligations through an assessment of risk and hazards that the mission partner may face, including any of those that are unique to the foreign country the mission partner is travelling to. During the process of sending a mission partner it is imperative for church leadership to be satisfied their obligations under the HSWA

are considered. That should involve working through the checklist section of this guide with the prospective mission partner and determining how compliance with HSWA requirements will be met. It should also include recording how further hazards and risks will be identified and how near misses and incidents are reported and to whom.

NOTE: These obligations and responsibilities should not prevent the commissioning of mission partners to areas of the world where risks and hazards are significant. That is not the purpose of the legislation. However, there is a need for a thorough assessment

of perceived risks and hazards so appropriate responses can be put in place to manage and eliminate or minimise them. The HSWA is all about the assessment, management, and elimination or minimisation of risks and hazards. Under the guidance of God and with suitable processes in place, this can be achieved and our obligations under the HSWA will be met.

It is interesting to observe the biblical context here. Health and safety matters arise in the Old Testament laws, when building a house (Deut 22:8), and later when Jesus taught we are to love our neighbours as ourselves (Matt 22:36-40).



A copy of the full advice is available upon request – email admin@gc3.org.nz

Seize the Opportunity

Jesus has always polarised responses and has often caused controversy! During his public ministry Jesus attracted the ire of many people and was often forced to make alternative plans to keep himself safe (see John 11:53-54 and Luke 4:28-30).

In today's world little has changed. We can and should expect similar reactions from people when we participate in global missions. Threats of terrorism, extreme faith positions, unstable local political scenes and tensions between countries all contribute to this situation. Our mission partners need to plan for and may need to take decisive action to keep themselves from harm.

Jesus never promised that following and serving him would be easy and encouraged his disciples to count the cost and be willing to take up his cross (Luke 14: 25-34). Paul suffered greatly for his faith but in his New Testament writings he assures us of Jesus' love and the victory he won for us on the Cross (Rom 8:28-38). Jesus does promises that He will be with us through all the challenges and difficulties (Matt 28:20) and that he will never leave or abandon us (Deut 31:6).

Understanding these biblical principles prepares us well for adversity, when facing security

risks, opposition and even crisis situations. There are preparations we must not ignore as we proceed in faith and trust, without panic and over reaction, to ministry opportunities in cross cultural settings.

Let's never forget God's heart continues to beat for the lost and he still calls his people to take the gospel to all nations, despite the associated risks, with his clear promise to go with them!





What Are Our Responsibilities Under The HSWA?

The HSWA requires us to cover many aspects of wellness and we believe a holistic approach with open and frank conversations should be adopted.

Determine who from the sending church will be the liaison person to ask the hard questions required to ensure all HSWA matters are covered regularly and satisfactorily. Determine also how often these conversations will happen. There should be no surprises for the mission partner as to content and frequency.

The key to this exercise is openness, trust, rapport and relationship. Choose the church's liaison person carefully and be prepared to regularly review how the relationship is working out. Also be prepared to change the liaison person if there is any hint that would be beneficial.

Schedule regular interaction with your mission partner to ensure your HSWA obligations are managed well. Be sure to keep a log of all conversations and interactions around these HSWA issues, especially noting the actions agreed on to

assess, manage, and eliminate or minimise the risks and hazards.

See Appendix One for a template of a form to log HSWA interactions.

Note we can supply additional resources to assist church leaders when an event happens. See Appendix Two for details.

Checklist



THE MATERIAL IN THE FOLLOWING CHECKLIST is a suggested framework for a church to use. Its purpose is to assess, manage, eliminate or minimise the risks and hazards for each mission partner in their unique setting and situation. It is intended as a guide only. It is not a comprehensive list covering all aspects of health and safety.

Emotional

We encourage you to care for your mission partner's emotional state by asking probing questions given the knowledge you have of their ministry situation, their observed emotional health and well-being, their personality and past relationships.



Assess the emotional risk to your mission partner from a HSWA perspective for you to be satisfied you've complied with your statutory obligations.

To assist you, consider the following questions. From your background knowledge, ask other questions to deal with any known risk. This list is not comprehensive but is provided to be a catalyst for wider discussion and discovery.

- How is your mission partner coping generally in the cross-cultural setting?
- Is there any evidence of mood swings, depression, relationship difficulties with spouse and / or colleagues?
- Is some time out of the situation required (eg a holiday or a furlough)?
- What situation is causing you the greatest grief currently?
- What is the greatest joy for you?
- Tell me about the latest connection with your biological family back home?
- What has been the greatest surprise for you in the past month?
- What was the last book you read through for enjoyment?
- How do you replenish your emotional energy?
- What family needs (with both parents and children) are presenting and how might they best be met?
- What emotional ties have you developed with indigenous and expatriate colleagues?

Overarching Question

What emotional frustration are you facing right now that is or could become a HSWA risk?

Physical

We encourage you to care for your mission partner's physical state by asking probing questions given the knowledge you have of their ministry situation, their past physical health and well-being as well as their personality.

Assess the physical risk to your mission partner from a HSWA perspective for you to be satisfied you've complied with your statutory obligations.

To assist you, consider the following questions. From your background knowledge, ask other questions to deal with any known risk. This list is not comprehensive but is provided to be a catalyst for wider discussion.

- When was the last full medical assessment carried out?
- What remedial action has been taken regarding any medical concerns?
- What is being done to maintain fitness?
- Is your mission partner eating well? Is it difficult or expensive to source wholesome food for a balanced diet?
- Is there an imminent threat of physical danger or harm? (If or when this happens the mission partner should contact the liaison person immediately.)
- What arrangements are in place should the mission partner need urgent evacuation?
- In a 'Restricted Access Country' are all precautionary steps taken to minimise adverse impact on ministry and colleagues? (see Appendix Three for special considerations)
- What risks are there of living in country? (eg smog, land mines, water pollution)
- What risks are there from local animals, reptiles and insects?
- What identified risks are there in the home / work environment? (eg electric cords, floor mats, ladders, wet surfaces, etc)

Overarching Question

What physical frustration are you facing right now that is or could become a HSWA risk?

Social

We encourage you to care for your mission partner's social state by asking probing questions given the knowledge you have of their ministry situation, their past socialisation characteristics as well as their personality.

Assess the social risk to your mission partner from a HSWA perspective for you to be satisfied you've complied with your statutory obligations.

To assist you, consider the following questions. From your background knowledge, ask other questions to deal with any known risk. This list is not comprehensive but is provided to be a catalyst for wider discussion.

- Are we relating to an introvert who is happy with their own company or an extravert who prefers people around them?
- Does isolation prevent effective socialisation for all members of the family?
- If the mission partner is living in close quarters with other members of the same mission team, what 'time out' is programmed?

Overarching Question

What social frustration are you facing right now that is or could become a HSWA risk?



Financial

We encourage you to care for your mission partner's financial state by asking probing questions given the knowledge you have of their ministry situation, the regular funding they receive and the financial demands of their ministry.

Assess the financial risk to your mission partner from a HSWA perspective for you to be satisfied you've complied with your statutory obligations.

To assist you, consider the following questions. From your background knowledge, ask other questions to deal with any known risk. This list is not comprehensive but is provided to be a catalyst for wider discussion.

- Does the mission partner have sufficient cash flow for living and ministry to prevent undue financial pressure?
- How do you ensure this is the case? Is there a need for your church (or others) to meet financial shortfalls, or does ministry need to be scaled back?
- How will unforeseen financial contingencies be funded?
- What medical insurance covers are in place? Who pays the premiums?
- What provision is being made for regular furloughs, superannuation, etc?

Overarching Question

What financial frustration are you facing right now that is or could become a HSWA risk?

Spiritual

We encourage you to care for your mission partner's spiritual state by asking probing questions given the knowledge you have of their ministry situation, their past walk with God, their theological training and perspective and their spiritual resilience.

Assess the spiritual risk to your mission partner from a HSWA perspective for you to be satisfied you've complied with your statutory obligations.

To assist you, consider the following questions. From your background knowledge, ask other questions to deal with any known risk. This list is not comprehensive but is provided to be a catalyst for wider discussion.

- How does your mission partner receive spiritual refreshment and nourishment?
- What can be put in place to ensure adequate spiritual renewal is maintained?
- Is there undue pressure on your mission partner to come up with all the biblical answers in the church setting?
- Is adequate attention given to keep the marriage strong?
- What temptation do you struggle with the most?
- Who is your mentor?

Overarching Question

What spiritual frustration are you facing right now that is or could become a HSWA risk?



Appendix One

Log of HSWA Interactions

Name of sending church: _____

Name of church liaison: _____

Name of mission partner: _____

NOTE: Use additional sheets for each interaction to maintain a complete and reliable record of matters discussed.

DATE OF HSWA CONVERSATION:

Names of those present: _____

Risks and hazards identified / near miss or incident discussed:

Appendix Two

When an Event Happens

If your mission partner experiences one of the following events, we are here to help. We have checklists to assist sending church leaders understand their HSW obligations along with suggested practices and protocols. The events covered by this material are

CRIMINAL

- child abuse allegations
- criminal charges
- imprisonment
- sexual misdemeanour

FINANCIAL

- bankruptcy
- financial irregularities
- fraud

SPIRITUAL

- doctrinal deviation
- marital infidelity, separation, divorce

PHYSICAL

- fire, flood, major loss
- hijacking, ransom demand
- outbreak of war
- political coup
- serious accident, injury, hospitalisation
- serious illness, mental breakdown
- terrorist assault

Appendix Three

RAC - Practical Security Measures

In a 'Restricted Access Country' there is often an environment of suspicion, accompanied by a heightened need for care. Here are a range of precautions a mission partner should implement for their safety and protection.

GENERAL

- Have an escape plan sorted that you can execute at any time for safe passage out of the country
- Ensure every member of the family knows how it will work
- Discuss details of how various events or scenarios might play out
- Agree on code words that you might use in given situations
- Select a reputable taxi service you could use in an event or a reliable friend who could transport you to the airport

LOCAL TRAVEL

- Vary the route you take to the office, church, supermarket, etc each time
- Avoid travelling at the same time each day if possible
- Always park your vehicle to enable a quick get-away (back into a parking spot, leaving sufficient space at the front)

COMMUNICATION

- Have high regard to the need for passwords on phones
- Consider the protection offered by a satellite phone, despite the higher cost
- Sophisticated surveillance methods are used to scan email traffic so ensure all mail received is 'sanitised'
- Don't use your cell phone in an incident if at all possible
- Know how to contact a specific individual at the local embassy 24/7, someone who knows you well and whom you can trust
- Never leave home without giving an expected return time, and if you are prevented from returning at that expected time for good reason, let your spouse know of the delay

OTHER GC3 PUBLICATIONS YOU MAY FIND USEFUL

IS GOD CALLING YOU?

OUR COMMENDATION PROCESS

This guide outlines the biblical basis of commendation and considers how commendation might work. It also contains topics and conversation starters to help explore a candidate's suitability for mission work.

RETURNING TO NZ PERMANENTLY?

A GUIDE FOR CHURCHES AND MISSION PARTNERS.

This guide encourages churches and mission partners to consider all the arrangements that need to be made when a mission partner returns permanently from their service for God overseas.

RETURNING FOR A HOME VISIT?

A GUIDE FOR CHURCHES AND MISSION PARTNERS.

This guide contains suggestions for a successful home visit and ways for your mission partner to reflect on their experience and ensure they have a fresh or continuing call for a new term of service.



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