

## Resource PSA-GUIDE-002

# Understanding Your PCBU Duties A Practical Guide for Small Business Owners

Many business owners have heard the term "PCBU" but aren't entirely sure what it means or what their legal responsibilities are.

The good news is that the concept is much simpler than many people think.

## What is a PCBU?

PCBU stands for Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking.

In practical terms, if you operate a business, employ workers, engage contractors, run a farm, manage a company, or conduct any work activity, you are likely a PCBU.

Examples include:

- Builders
- Electricians
- Landscapers
- Farmers
- Transport operators
- Professional service firms
- Medical practices
- Plant hire businesses

A company can be a PCBU, and in some cases individuals can also have responsibilities as officers of the business.

## What Does a PCBU Have to Do?

The Work Health and Safety legislation requires PCBUs to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers and others who may be affected by the work.

That sounds complicated, but it really comes down to five key responsibilities.

## 1. Provide a Safe Workplace

Workplaces should be free from obvious hazards wherever possible.

This includes:

- Safe access and egress
- Good housekeeping
- Appropriate lighting
- Safe traffic management
- Suitable amenities

## 2. Provide Safe Systems of Work

Workers should understand how work is to be performed safely.

Examples include:

- Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS)
- Procedures
- Work instructions
- Toolbox talks
- Pre-start inspections

## 3. Provide Safe Plant and Equipment

Equipment should be:

- Fit for purpose
- Properly maintained
- Inspected regularly
- Used by competent people

## 4. Provide Information, Training and Supervision

Workers need to understand:

- Hazards
- Risks
- Controls
- Emergency procedures

Training alone is not enough. Appropriate supervision is also required.

## 5. Consult With Workers

Workers often identify risks before management does.

Consultation may include:

- Toolbox talks
- Safety meetings
- Hazard reporting
- Informal discussions

## What Does "Reasonably Practicable" Mean?

The law does not require perfection.

It requires businesses to do what is reasonably able to be done to eliminate or minimise risk.

When determining what is reasonably practicable, factors include:

- The likelihood of harm
- The severity of potential consequences
- What is known about the hazard
- Available control measures
- Cost versus risk

## Common Mistakes Made by Small Businesses

Many businesses believe that safety is only about paperwork.

In reality, paperwork is only evidence of a safety system.

Common mistakes include:

- SWMS completed but never used
- Hazard reports ignored
- Toolbox talks not conducted
- Plant inspections not recorded
- Workers not consulted

## How Can You Demonstrate Compliance?

Good examples include:

- Current SWMS
- Pre-start inspections
- Toolbox talks
- Training records
- Maintenance records
- Incident reports
- Hazard registers

These records help demonstrate that safety is actively managed.

## The Bottom Line

Being a PCBU is not about creating endless paperwork.

It is about identifying hazards, managing risks, consulting with workers, and taking reasonable steps to keep people safe.

When safety systems are practical and easy to use, compliance becomes much easier and workplaces become safer.

Need help creating SWMS, pre-start inspections or toolbox talks? Practical Safety Advisory provides practical tools designed specifically for Australian businesses.

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