WORKSAFE
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HSWA

QUICK GUIDE

THIS GUIDANCE APPLIES FROM 1 APRIL 2027

Working with other PCBUs to manage work risks

This guide explains when PCBUs must cooperate to manage risks depending on the size of the PCBUs and types of risk involved.

KEY MESSAGES

- When PCBUs work together they may have the same duty relating to the same group of people, risks or work activities (an overlapping duty).
- Where duties overlap, PCBUs must cooperate with each other so far as is reasonably practicable in relation to that matter.
- Whether duties relating to managing risk overlap will depend on whether the PCBUs are small or large PCBUs and whether the risk is a critical risk.
- Small PCBUs must so far as is reasonably practicable, cooperate with other PCBUs in relation to critical risks but they also may cooperate with other PCBUs in relation to other risks.
- Large PCBUs must so far as is reasonably practicable cooperate with other PCBUs for all relevant risks. They must prioritise critical risks.
- PCBUs can enter into an agreement or contract to work together on risks beyond the minimum legal requirements but they cannot contract out of or transfer their duties.

For guidance that explains duties for small and large PCBUs and critical risk see:

- Am I a small or large PBCU?
- What is a critical risk?
- Managing critical risks for small PCBUs
- Prioritising critical risks for large PCBUs

What does cooperate mean?

To cooperate means demonstrating the following 'three Cs':

1. A PCBU must **consult** with other PCBUs when they both have duties about the same matter.

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2. A PCBU must **cooperate** with other PCBUs when they both have duties about the same matter.
3. A PCBU must **coordinate** their activities with other PCBUs when they both have duties about the same matter.

When the small PCBU duty to cooperate on overlapping duties is limited

When PCBUs work together, they may have the same duty relating to the same group of people, risks or work activities.

Where duties overlap, PCBUs must cooperate with each other so far as is reasonably practicable in relation to that matter.

Whether duties relating to managing risk overlap will depend on whether the PCBUs are small or large PCBUs and whether the risk is a critical risk.

A small PCBU can only have an overlapping duty with another PCBU (of any size) when the duty relates to a critical risk, unless they have entered an agreement or contract with the other PCBU that requires them to manage other risks.

For general guidance on working with other PCBUs to manage overlapping duties see:

- Overlapping duties
- PCBUs working together: advice when contracting

When you need to cooperate with other businesses

IF YOU ARE A SMALL PCBU AND YOU ARE WORKING WITH ANOTHER PCBU:	**IF YOU ARE A LARGE PCBU AND YOU ARE WORKING WITH ANOTHER PBCU:**
– you must so far as is reasonably practicable cooperate where both PCBUs have duties relating to the same critical risk – you may choose to cooperate on other risks, but you do not have to.	– you must so far as is reasonably practicable cooperate with all other PCBUs where duties relate to the same risks – you must prioritise critical risks – you must cooperate with small PCBUs on all risks, so far as is reasonably practicable, although the small PCBU is only required to cooperate on critical risks.

PCBUs of any size can contract with each other to manage all risks

PCBUs can agree to work together on risks beyond the minimum legal requirements.

For example, a contract may require a small PCBU to, so far as is reasonably practicable, participate in managing other risks. However, no contract can transfer or remove a PCBU's HSWA duties.

Other duties

Other duties such as worker welfare duties continue to apply because these duties are about basic working conditions, not risk levels. Where two or more PCBUs share responsibility for matters such as (for example):

- toilets
- drinking water
- hand washing facilities
- first aid
- emergency planning.

They must cooperate to ensure workers have appropriate facilities. This duty applies no matter the size of the PCBUs.

For more information see General risk and workplace management – part 1

Examples

EXAMPLE 1
A large and small PCBU working together

Scenario

A large construction company is managing a worksite at a multi-storey building (large PCBU).

A small electrical subcontractor with 10 workers (small PCBU) is doing electrical work within the building.

Critical risks

- Electrical work where there is a risk of electrocution
- Falls while working at height

What the PCBUs must do

Both PCBUs must so far as is reasonably practicable cooperate on control measures for critical risks, including work planning, worker information, supervision and PPE. For example:

- share information about hazards
- hold joint safety meetings about electrical work and work at height
- coordinate electrical isolation procedures
- coordinate work at height control measures
- communicate changes that could affect worker safety
- arrange supervision relevant to those risks.

Other risks

The subcontractor may cooperate with the construction company to manage other risks (such as the risk of musculoskeletal harm from repetitive actions) but they do not have to. They only need to if they agree through an agreement or contract to participate in site-wide arrangements for other risks.

EXAMPLE 2
A large and small PCBU working together

Scenario

A large PCBU manages a forestry harvesting operation. They are working with a harvesting contractor, which is a small PCBU.

Both PCBUs have duties relating to harvesting activities because there are critical risks to manage.

Critical risks

- Falling trees or branches
- Injury from machinery

What the PCBUs must do

Both PCBUs must so far as is reasonably practicable cooperate on control measures for critical risks. This includes worker training and competence in relation to the critical risks, supervision of high-risk work, and PPE requirements in relation to the critical risks. For example:

- have pre-start meetings to make sure everyone is aware of the critical risks and required control measures
- coordinate harvesting zones
- establish exclusion areas
- coordinate machinery movements
- communicate changes to harvesting activities
- sharing information about hazards – identifying any new or emerging critical risks that need managing.

Other risks

The harvesting contractor may choose to work with the forestry management PCBU on other risks (such as the risk of musculoskeletal harm from repetitive actions) but is not required to.

The parties may also agree through a contract that the harvesting contractor will participate in site-wide arrangements for other risks.

EXAMPLE 3
Three small PCBUs working together

Scenario

A small plumbing company (5 workers) and a small electrical company (3 workers) have been hired by a motel owner (4 workers) to do renovation work. All 3 businesses have fewer than 20 workers each.

The electrical company is installing heated towel rails in the motel's bathrooms. The plumbing company is installing new tapware in the motel's bathrooms at the same time. All the work needs to be completed within one week so the motel can reopen as soon as possible.

Critical risks

- Electrical work where there is a risk of electrocution

What the PCBUs must do

Because the work involves a critical risk, all 3 PCBUs must so far as is reasonably practicable cooperate with each other in relation to that critical risk. For example:

- share information about hazards and critical risks
- hold combined safety meetings about electrical work (including in potential wet areas)
- coordinate timing of work so the plumbers and electrical workers are not trying to work in the same spaces at the same time
- coordinate electrical isolation procedures
- communicate changes that could affect worker safety across all 3 PCBUs
- arrange supervision relevant to those risks.

Other risks

All are small PCBUs, so none is required to manage other risks but they may still choose to.

EXAMPLE 4
Two large PCBUs working together

Scenario

A large structural steel company and a large crane services company are both involved in lifting and installing structural steel at a commercial construction site.

Critical risks

- Falling objects during crane lifting operations
- Being crushed by suspended loads
- Falling while working at height
- Collisions with moving plant

What the PCBUs must do

Because the work involves critical risks, both PCBUs must so far as is reasonably practicable cooperate activities with each other in relation to those critical risks. For example:

- lifting plans
- exclusion zones
- crane movements
- work sequencing
- worker training and competency requirements
- supervision arrangements
- PPE requirements.

Other risks

The PCBUs must also so far as is reasonably practicable cooperate in relation to other risks, such as:

- minor slip and trip hazards in the lunchroom
- routine site access arrangements.

EXAMPLE 5
Two small PCBUs working together

Scenario

A roofing company with 8 workers and a solar installation company with 6 workers are both carrying out work on the roof of a commercial building.

Critical risks

- Falls while working at height
- Electrocution while doing electrical installation work

What the PCBUs must do

Because the work involves critical risks, both PCBUs must so far as is reasonably practicable cooperate with each other in relation to those critical risks. For example:

- agree on roof access arrangements
- agree on fall prevention systems and edge protection
- confirm electrical isolation procedures.

Other risks

Neither business has a duty to cooperate in relation to other risks, but they may still choose to.