

Interview with a WorkSafe Inspector

We interviewed Amy Baker, a WorkSafe Inspector for the public sector and community services program to find out what the main safety issues are in early childhood services.

1 What are the duties of a WorkSafe Inspector?

A WorkSafe Inspector is generally assigned to an industry, I am assigned to Community Services and Public Sector. An Inspector goes into workplaces to check for compliance with occupational health and safety legislation and also to provide guidance and will go into a workplace for a variety of reasons, such as from a complaint where an employee has reported an alleged health and safety issue or, possibly through Workcover claims.

2 What usually happens when you come to a kindergarten/preschool/early childhood service, to perform an inspection?

Unless there is an emergency I would usually make an appointment before I just turn up as I understand that you are busy. When I do come into your workplace I usually sit down with staff and the health and safety representative asking lots of questions. I do this to see what you know about health and safety so that I provide you with the right information. Then I walk through the workplace to see how things are being done, looking for things that may cause injuries such as lifting heavy items. I may also speak to a few of the employees. My job is to check if there are any breaches of the legislation. Are there things that the employees are doing that could be done differently so that they are less likely to get hurt. If I do find something that could be improved I discuss options on how it can be improved and I will then follow up with another visit to make sure it has been done.

3 What are some of the main safety issues at kindergartens/preschools/childcare centres?

The main concern for employees who work in these settings is manual handling. Things such as lifting children onto change tables, where there could be steps provided, moving heavy sandpit covers, where less heavy covers could be provided, not having appropriate seating, and storage rooms being overstocked, which makes some items hard to get to, and may cause a person to strain or fall from a ladder trying to get stock. What I do find though is that when there are staff meetings where people can raise issues, then the issues are usually dealt with. Communicating is the key to health and safety.

4 What feedback and reports do you give to services?

At the end of any inspection I write a report and give it to you at the time of the visit. The report summarises what we spoke about and what we looked at during the inspection. It may also have Notices attached to it that outline certain things that need to be done, within a certain timeframe. The Notices will give you guidance on how things can be done.

5 Do services have a specific timeframe to act upon your reports?

If I do issue a Notice that requires certain things to be done then I usually speak with you about how long you think it will take to get it done. I will negotiate a timeframe and make a set date that will be on the report. So there is no set period, for some things it may be a small job and take a week, some other things may require a bit of work or expense which may be reasonable to have a few months to do. It also depends on the risk to a person, if there is a high likelihood that a person could get injured from doing a certain task, then a shorter timeframe may be appropriate.

6 If services have questions who can they contact?

WorkSafe has an advisory line which anyone can call to ask for advice. The phone call can remain confidential. The number is 1800 136 089. WorkSafe also has a great website, with heaps of info, including specific information on childcare. Worksafe.vic.gov.au and of course if I have been and done an inspection at your workplace, you will have my card, so you can also call me.

