

## **AIHS Position Statement: Climate Change and Work Health and Safety**

### **Purpose**

The Australian Institute of Health & Safety (AIHS) is committed to safeguarding the health, safety and wellbeing of workers as climate change intensifies and creates new or heightened work health and safety (WHS) risks.

This Statement sets out the AIHS position on climate-related challenges and recommends risk mitigation priorities for stakeholders across the Australian WHS ecosystem, including regulators, policymakers, businesses, designers and WHS professionals.

In this Statement, *climate* refers to meteorological conditions and *climate change* relates to long-term variations over decades or more ([ISO 45007, 2025](#)). Climate change is projected to manifest itself as more frequent extreme weather events, resulting in cascading risks for workers and their communities. These challenges are without precedent in modern history. They require new approaches and should not be regarded as business as usual with marginal adjustment.

The Statement draws on findings from the 2024 AIHS Member Survey, the March 2025 National Workshop on Climate Change and WHS, and a review of published empirical evidence and guidance to June 2025. It is not intended as a once-off comprehensive review, but rather as a foundation for continued action. Its focus is on equipping WHS professionals and the AIHS itself to lead in research, practice, and advocacy.

As the peak body for WHS professionals, the AIHS plays an important role in supporting and empowering the profession to address these emerging or enhanced risks. We advocate for climate-adaptive practices, leadership in tackling these challenges, and evidence-based solutions that enable businesses to embed sustainable, worker-centred safety into their operations.

## Context

As outlined in the 2023-2033 Australian WHS Strategy, climate-related risks are increasingly affecting Australian workplaces in many ways ([Safe Work Australia, 2023](#)). Apart from direct WHS impacts from climate change, additional or new risks can arise from interventions aimed at climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Resilience must be built across WHS systems, while recognising vulnerabilities and opportunities for sustainability and efficiency ([National Health and Climate Strategy, 2023](#)).

The 2024 AIHS Member Survey provided important insights. Respondents reported heat-related productivity loss, mental ill health, and respiratory and infectious disease outcomes as the most common issues over the previous three years. Yet fewer than 25% of respondents felt confident in their ability to help organisations manage climate-related WHS risks. Notably, younger WHS professionals were more likely to identify climate impacts and show awareness of associated risks. This aligns with broader research showing that younger workers tend to view climate change as a significant threat ([Tapia-Echanove et al, 2025](#)).

The findings highlight the urgent need for training, guidance and resources to enable WHS professionals to effectively address climate-related risks. Mental health is a key issue, which may be related to multiple climate-related hazards. These results are consistent with international studies, which underscore the potential of a well-trained WHS workforce to mitigate risks through effective workplace controls ([Pedersen et al, 2021](#)).

## **The AIHS Position on Climate Change and WHS**

We suggest the following risk mitigation actions for selected stakeholders in the Australian WHS ecosystem.

### **Regulators and Policymakers**

- Develop comprehensive, climate-adaptive WHS frameworks and reforms that address evolving risks and encourage innovation and collaboration (Humphrys, 2024).
- Ensure all new and existing WHS standards and guidance incorporate climate considerations (ISO, 2024).
- Pursue a fair and just transition to climate-resilient workplaces, with accountability for businesses and designers. Particular focus should be given to protecting vulnerable sectors and ensuring measures are equitable and sustainable.

### **Businesses**

- Embed climate-related risks into health and safety management systems (ISO 45007, 2025), updating protocols to address rising temperatures, extreme weather, and pollution hazards, alongside adequate protective equipment and mental health support.
- Conduct comprehensive risk assessments and scenario planning for a range of climate futures, stress-testing operations, assets, and supply chains.
- Invest in adaptation and innovation, including heat-mitigation technologies, partnerships with research bodies, and the development of new safety measures for emerging risks.
- Address the psychological impacts of climate change by integrating mental health supports, recognising that climate-induced trauma and stress are significant and growing risks for workers.

## **The Australian Institute of Health and Safety**

The AIHS commits to:

- Equipping WHS professionals with the tools, resources, and education to lead on climate resilience, supported by continuous professional development and knowledge-sharing.
- Encouraging reporting and transparent learning from climate-driven WHS incidents and near misses.
- Promoting the use of risk registers, scorecards and other tools to track and address climate-related incidents.
- Actively engaging in policy discussions at state and national levels to ensure WHS perspectives are embedded in climate action.
- Collaborating with professional bodies, unions, industry, and scientific organisations to advance effective climate-WHS responses.
- Supporting research, case studies, and pilot projects that demonstrate practical adaptation strategies.
- Recognising and rewarding innovation in climate-related WHS solutions through AIHS platforms and accolades.
- Regularly reviewing and refining AIHS policies to remain aligned with emerging science, technology, and the evolving climate landscape.

## References

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