

Chapter 3

Workplace Arrangements for Worker Participation in OHS

David Walters

This chapter offers a commentary on the representation of workers' interests in the development of approaches to regulating health and safety at work. It aims to stimulate a discussion of key issues at both policy and practical levels that underpin the kind of workplace arrangements for occupational health and safety (OHS), required by regulation in both Australia and European Union (EU) member states. It is concerned with future policy development and, more importantly, its effective application at the level of the work environment. The central focus of the chapter is on the notion of self-regulation and its implied involvement of workers and their organisations in OHS. It is concerned with features of such arrangements that make them useful and relevant and it acknowledges the existence of a changing constellation of macro-level influences on them. Of special concern therefore is understanding what are the supports and constraints for the continuation and development of participative arrangements for OHS management (OHSM).

The chapter begins by locating the representation of workers' interests in their work environment in Australia and the EU within 'post-Robens' approaches to OHS internationally. It draws attention to features of these approaches that socio-legal discourse has termed 'reflexive regulation' and outlines their main elements. The evidence for the effectiveness of representation and participation is reviewed, and a commentary is offered on what makes them effective. Some key issues confronting their continued relevance in a changing world of work are identified. Particular challenges include structural changes in work and the labour market, and the decline of trade union density and influence. Finally, a tentative discussion is presented of some current and future responses to such challenges from state and stakeholder interests.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.