Professional Standard 7 – Health and Safety (Summary)

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Professional Standard 7 – Health and Safety

1. Purpose

To ensure that all WAFA members maintain safe, inclusive, and compliant workplace environments that protect the physical and psychological health and safety of people and animals.

2. Scope

This standard applies to all WAFA members, including their staff, volunteers, contractors, clients, visitors, and animals across all work environments where animal training, handling, or service delivery occurs.

3. Standard Statement

WAFA members are committed to maintaining the highest standards of health and safety through comprehensive risk management, inclusive practices, and proactive systems to prevent harm. Members must ensure all operations comply with relevant legislation and best practice standards in work health and safety (WHS), animal safety, infection control, and psychosocial wellbeing.

4. Definitions

- **Hazard**: Anything with the potential to cause harm (physical, psychological, environmental).
- **Risk Management**: The process of identifying, assessing, and mitigating potential hazards.
- **Infectious Disease Control**: Protocols and procedures to prevent the transmission of communicable illnesses.
- **Psychosocial Risk**: Factors in the work environment that may cause stress, burnout, or other mental health impacts.
- **Whistleblower Protection**: Legal and procedural safeguards allowing individuals to report concerns confidentially and without retaliation.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Board:** Responsible for governance, setting strategic direction, risk management, financial oversight, and compliance with WAFA standards.
- **Senior Leadership:** Implements board policies and manages day-to-day operations.
- **Staff and Volunteers:** Support organisational objectives under leadership direction and adhere to governance policies.

6. Risk Management and Hazard Control

Members must establish, implement, and maintain comprehensive risk management frameworks that proactively identify, assess, mitigate, and monitor all potential hazards within their operations. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- **Hazard Identification:** Conduct regular and systematic inspections, audits, and consultations with staff, volunteers, handlers, and clients to identify potential hazards that could cause injury, illness, or harm to people or animals. This should cover all areas including training facilities, transport, client environments, and animal housing.
- **Risk Assessment:** Evaluate the likelihood and potential severity of identified hazards using a formal Hazard Risk Matrix or similar tool. This matrix typically categorises risks by:
    - **Likelihood:** How probable it is that the hazard will cause harm (e.g., Rare, Unlikely, Possible, Likely, Almost Certain).
    - **Consequence:** The potential impact or severity of the harm (e.g., Insignificant, Minor, Moderate, Major, Catastrophic).

By plotting likelihood against consequence, the matrix assigns a risk rating (e.g., Low, Medium, High, Extreme), guiding prioritisation of control measures. This systematic approach ensures consistent and objective evaluation of risks.

- **Control Measures:** Implement effective controls based on the risk rating, following the hierarchy of controls framework (elimination, substitution, engineering controls, administrative controls, and personal protective equipment) to reduce risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level. Examples include:
    - **Physical:** Installation of non-slip flooring, secure fencing, adequate lighting, and safety signage.
    - **Biological:** Protocols to manage zoonotic disease risks, animal vaccinations, and hygiene practices.
    - **Chemical:** Safe storage, handling, and use of cleaning agents, disinfectants, and medications.
    - **Psychosocial:** Stress reduction strategies, access to mental health supports, and limits on work hours to prevent burnout.
- **Monitoring and Review:** Continuously monitor hazard controls for effectiveness through incident tracking, feedback mechanisms, and regular review cycles. Adapt and improve control measures based on new information, incident investigations, or changes in operational context.
- **Documentation and Reporting:** Maintain comprehensive records of risk assessments, control measures, incident reports, and staff training. Report significant hazards or incidents to WAFA and relevant regulatory bodies promptly.

- **Training and Awareness:** Ensure all personnel are trained in hazard recognition, safe work practices, and their roles in risk management. Promote a workplace culture that encourages proactive reporting and shared responsibility for safety.

7. Infectious Disease Prevention and Control

Members must establish, document, and enforce robust infectious disease prevention and control protocols to safeguard the health of staff, volunteers, clients, visitors, and animals. These protocols must include but are not limited to:

- **Hand Hygiene**: Promote and facilitate regular handwashing with soap and water or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers at key times, such as before and after animal handling, eating, or contact with shared surfaces.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** Ensure appropriate PPE (e.g., gloves, masks, gowns, eye protection) is available, correctly used, and disposed of in accordance with infection control standards. Provide training on proper PPE donning and doffing procedures.
- **Vaccination Requirements:** Encourage and/or mandate relevant vaccinations for staff and volunteers as per national guidelines, including influenza, COVID-19, tetanus, and any other vaccines recommended for individuals working with animals or vulnerable populations.
- **Routine Cleaning and Disinfection:** Implement regular cleaning schedules for all work areas, animal facilities, equipment, and shared spaces using approved disinfectants effective against common pathogens. Emphasise high-touch surface disinfection and appropriate waste management.
- **Quarantine and Isolation Procedures:** Develop clear protocols for isolating and managing sick or potentially infectious animals and staff. This includes symptom monitoring, exclusion from work or training environments, and criteria for safe return.
- **Adaptability to Public Health Advice:** Maintain active monitoring of public health updates from relevant authorities (e.g., Australian Government Department of Health, state health departments) and promptly update infection control policies and practices to reflect current recommendations or legal requirements.
- **Training and Communication:** Provide regular training and accessible communication to all personnel about infection risks, prevention measures, and responsibilities. Encourage a culture of vigilance and prompt reporting of symptoms or exposures.
- **Recordkeeping:** Maintain accurate records of infection control training, vaccination status, cleaning schedules, and any infectious disease incidents or exposures.

By adhering to these comprehensive infection control measures, WAFA members contribute to a safer environment for people and animals alike, mitigating the risk of disease outbreaks and ensuring operational continuity.

8. Ergonomics and Physical Wellbeing

Members must prioritise ergonomic safety and physical wellbeing in all work practices to prevent injuries and promote long-term health of staff and volunteers. This includes:

- **Ergonomic Assessments:** Conduct regular workplace ergonomic evaluations to identify risks related to posture, repetitive motions, lifting, and workspace design. Use assessment findings to recommend and implement improvements.
- **Safe Lifting and Handling Techniques:** Provide training and resources on correct body mechanics, lifting methods, and the use of mechanical aids to reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries during manual handling tasks involving animals, equipment, or materials.
- **Injury Prevention Training:** Ensure all personnel receive education on recognizing early signs of strain or injury, the importance of breaks and stretches, and strategies to avoid repetitive strain injuries or overexertion.
- **Access to Appropriate Tools and Supports:** Facilitate availability of ergonomic aids such as adjustable chairs, lifting devices, anti-fatigue mats, and equipment designed to reduce physical strain during animal care and handling activities.
- **Workload Management:** Promote balanced task allocation, sufficient rest periods, and flexibility to accommodate individual physical capacities and limitations, reducing risk of fatigue and injury.
- **Reporting and Support:** Encourage prompt reporting of any discomfort, pain, or injury and provide access to occupational health services, physiotherapy, or rehabilitation supports as needed.
- **Inclusive Design:** Ensure that ergonomic solutions consider diverse physical needs and abilities, promoting accessibility and safety for all personnel including those with disabilities.

By embedding ergonomic principles and supporting physical wellbeing, members protect their workforce's health, enhance productivity, and reduce absenteeism and compensation claims.

9. Animal Behaviour Monitoring and Safety

Members must implement continuous, systematic monitoring of all assistance and working animals under their care to promptly identify any behavioural changes or indicators that may signal stress, discomfort, fear, anxiety, or aggression. This includes:

- **Regular Behavioural Assessments:** Conduct scheduled and spontaneous observations during training, handling, transport, and daily care routines to assess the animal's emotional state and wellbeing. Document findings to track trends or emerging concerns.
- **Recognition of Stress and Warning Signs:** Train staff, handlers, and volunteers to recognise subtle and overt behavioural signs such as body language cues (e.g., lip

licking, yawning, tail position), vocalizations, avoidance behaviours, or aggression. Awareness of species-specific signals is essential.

- **Risk Mitigation Protocols:** Develop clear, written procedures for managing animals that exhibit challenging or unsafe behaviours. These protocols must include steps for:
    - Safe separation or removal of animals from situations or environments that trigger distress or aggression
    - Appropriate use of humane management tools such as muzzles, halters, harnesses, or calming aids only when necessary and in accordance with animal welfare legislation
    - Immediate intervention plans to protect both animals and humans, minimizing risk of injury or escalation
- **Compliance with Animal Welfare Laws:** All handling and behaviour management must comply with relevant state and federal animal welfare regulations and codes of practice, ensuring methods are ethical, non-aversive, and promote positive animal welfare outcomes.
- **Incident Documentation and Review:** Record any behavioural incidents, injuries, or near misses promptly and conduct reviews to identify causes and improve safety measures.
- **Ongoing Behavioural Training:** Provide regular upskilling for all personnel in animal behaviour understanding, positive reinforcement training techniques, and conflict prevention.

Through vigilant behaviour monitoring and proactive safety protocols, members safeguard the wellbeing of both animals and people, fostering a safe, respectful, and effective working environment.

10. Accessibility and Inclusive Safety

WAFA members must ensure all health and safety practices and environments are fully inclusive and accessible to people of all abilities, recognizing that diverse needs must be met to achieve equitable safety outcomes. This includes:

- **Accessible Emergency Evacuation Routes:** Design and maintain emergency exits and evacuation paths that accommodate wheelchair users, mobility aids, and people with sensory or cognitive impairments. Routes must be clearly marked, unobstructed, and regularly tested.
- **Visual and Auditory Alarms:** Install and maintain alarms that provide both visual (e.g., flashing lights) and auditory signals to alert all individuals, including those with hearing or vision impairments, to emergencies or hazards.

- **Communication Supports:** Provide alternative communication methods such as Auslan interpreters, captioning, Easy Read materials, or communication devices during safety drills, emergency announcements, and routine information sharing.
- **Reasonable Adjustments:** Make necessary modifications to workplace procedures, schedules, physical environments, and safety equipment to accommodate individual access needs, such as:
  - Adjusted workstation layouts
  - Provision of assistive devices
  - Modified emergency response plans tailored to specific disabilities
- **Training and Awareness:** Ensure all personnel receive training on inclusive safety principles, disability awareness, and how to assist colleagues or clients requiring support during emergencies.
- **Engagement with People with Disability:** Involve individuals with lived experience in safety planning, drills, and reviews to ensure measures meet practical accessibility needs and respect dignity.
- **Documentation and Continuous Improvement:** Maintain records of accessibility audits, emergency plans, and incident responses with a focus on identifying and addressing barriers to safe participation for all.

By embedding accessibility and inclusion at every level of health and safety planning and practice, WAFA members promote a culture of respect, equity, and preparedness, ensuring everyone can work and participate safely.

11. Environmental Safety

Members must ensure the safe and responsible management of all chemicals, cleaning agents, and animal waste within their facilities and work environments to protect human health, animal welfare, and the natural environment. This includes:

- **Safe Storage:** Chemicals and cleaning agents must be stored securely in clearly labelled containers, away from animal access and food preparation areas. Storage areas should be well-ventilated, locked when unattended, and compliant with relevant hazardous substance regulations.
- **Usage Logs and Inventory:** Maintain detailed records of all chemicals and agents used, including quantities, dates, and personnel responsible for their handling. Regularly review stock to prevent expired or unsafe substances from remaining on site.
- **Ventilation and Exposure Controls:** Ensure adequate ventilation systems are in place to minimize inhalation risks for staff, animals, and visitors when using cleaning products or chemicals. Use personal protective equipment (PPE) as appropriate.

- **Spill Response Procedures:** Develop and implement clear protocols for immediate and safe response to chemical spills or leaks, including containment, clean-up, and disposal. Staff must be trained in spill response and provided with appropriate spill kits.
- **Environmentally Responsible Disposal:** Animal waste and chemical residues must be disposed of in accordance with local environmental and health regulations to prevent contamination of soil, water, and air. Use approved waste management services where applicable.
- **Regular Audits and Risk Assessments:** Conduct periodic inspections to ensure compliance with environmental safety policies and identify opportunities for improvements or hazard mitigation.

12. Communication, Consultation, and Participation

Effective communication and active participation of all stakeholders are essential for fostering a proactive health and safety culture. Members must:

- **Regular Safety Consultations:** Hold scheduled meetings with staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders to discuss workplace hazards, review incident reports, and plan safety improvements.
- **Safety Committees:** Establish formal safety committees or working groups inclusive of diverse representatives who meet regularly to oversee health and safety initiatives and provide leadership.
- **Anonymous Feedback Channels:** Provide accessible options, such as suggestion boxes, online forms, or third-party hotlines, that allow individuals to report concerns or ideas confidentially without fear of reprisal.
- **Accessible Reporting Mechanisms:** Ensure reporting tools and communication methods are accessible to people with disabilities or language barriers by offering multiple formats and support services.
- **Transparent Communication:** Share safety information, policy updates, and outcomes of consultations openly with all members of the organisation to promote trust and collective responsibility.
- **Encourage Participation:** Foster an inclusive environment where all personnel feel empowered and supported to contribute ideas, raise concerns, and engage in safety improvement activities.

13. Reporting and Whistleblower Protection

Members must maintain robust, confidential, and supportive systems for reporting health and safety concerns, incidents, and breaches. This includes:

- **Clear Reporting Procedures:** Provide straightforward guidelines on how to report hazards, near misses, injuries, and unsafe behaviours, including whom to contact and timelines for reporting.

- **Confidentiality Guarantees:** Ensure that all reports are treated confidentially, with information shared only on a need-to-know basis to investigate and resolve issues effectively.
- **Whistleblower Protections:** Safeguard individuals who report concerns from any form of retaliation, discrimination, or disadvantage, in line with applicable whistleblower protection laws and organisational policies.
- **Incident Documentation:** Maintain comprehensive and accurate logs of all reported incidents, including investigations, corrective actions taken, and outcomes.
- **Timely Investigations and Follow-up:** Ensure prompt and impartial investigations are conducted, with findings communicated to relevant parties and preventive measures implemented.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Use data from reports and investigations to identify systemic risks and guide training, policy updates, and resource allocation.

14. Training, Certification, and Recordkeeping

To maintain a safe workplace and ensure compliance, members must:

- **Role-Specific Training:** Provide initial and ongoing health and safety training tailored to the specific roles and responsibilities of staff, volunteers, handlers, and contractors. Training should cover hazard identification, emergency response, safe animal handling, and use of PPE.
- **Certification Requirements:** Ensure all personnel hold relevant certifications or licenses necessary for their duties (e.g., first aid, animal handling, chemical safety).
- **Regular Refresher Courses:** Schedule and mandate periodic refresher sessions to update skills, reinforce safety culture, and incorporate changes in legislation or best practice.
- **Comprehensive Recordkeeping:** Maintain up-to-date and accurate records of all training activities, certifications obtained, health and safety audits, risk assessments, and incident reports.
- **Accessibility of Records:** Ensure records are securely stored yet readily accessible for review by WAFA, regulatory bodies, or internal management during audits, investigations, or compliance checks.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Use training and incident data to evaluate the effectiveness of safety programs and identify areas for enhancement.

15. Review, Revision and Approvals

This policy will be reviewed annually by the steering committee to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Any revisions will require approval from the steering committee.

16. Implementation

WAFA members must integrate these standards into governance frameworks, operational policies, financial management, human resources, and client service delivery to maintain high standards of accountability and organisational integrity.

17. Enforcement

WAFA enforces these standards through its accreditation and audit processes. Non-compliance will lead to remedial actions and may impact ongoing WAFA membership and certification status.

18. Contact Information

For further information or assistance related to this standard, please contact the steering committee at the following email address: admin@workinganimals.com.au

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Document Control

Version	Date	Author	Change Description	Approved By
V1.0	17/05/2025	V. Solomon	Initial	C.Williams