



Occupational Health and Safety Policy

The Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association (ASLIA) believes in the development and promotion of, and adherence to, safe working practices for all interpreters. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that interpreters, employers, hirers and clients are aware of what constitutes safe working conditions. Sign Language Interpreters who wish to work in the field, whether full-time, part-time, casual, sub-contract or pro bono (along with the employers/hirers of interpreters) need to be mindful of the hazards associated with their work and to take all reasonable measures to ensure that all foreseeable risks are eliminated or minimised. This document outlines ASLIA's policy regarding the prevention and treatment of various professional and workplace health and safety considerations, applicable to both Sign Language interpreters and employers of Sign Language interpreters.

Each state has its own workplace health and safety laws and regulations (see Resources). Interpreters need to be aware of their rights and responsibilities, and their employers' rights and responsibilities in relation to workplace health and safety. Interpreters need to be aware that, whether they are employees or freelancers, they may be legally liable if they do not adhere to safe working practices.

Potential Workplace Health and Safety Issues

Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS). OOS is "a collective term for a range of conditions characterised by discomfort or persistent pain in muscles, tendons and other soft tissues with or without physical manifestations" (National Occupational Health and Safety Commission, 1986). OOS is associated with repetitive movement, sustained or constrained postures, and as such is relevant for the Sign Language interpreting profession.

It is ASLIA's policy that Sign Language interpreters educate themselves on the causes, prevention and management of OOS and implement workable strategies to prevent against the development of OOS. This includes:

- taking regular breaks. Specifically a minimum of fifteen minutes after every 30 minutes of continuous repetitive work, in addition to meal breaks
- working for a maximum of five hours of actual interpreting per day if working a five-day working week
- for assignments longer than one hour, ensuring there is a second interpreter and working in turn, for periods of between fifteen and thirty minutes at a time
- for interpreting assignments of greater than two days' duration, working in a team of three interpreters
- exercises and stretching activities
- when initial symptoms present, immediately seeking professional medical advice
- setting a recuperation period, where entirely different tasks are performed, so that the affected limbs, ligaments and/or muscles are rested
- reporting symptoms early to an employer or hirer
- keeping notes of their physical condition after each assignment
- consider the impact of time away from work when returning from leave, ensuring they make allowances for re-adjusting to repetitive tasks and taking more rest breaks than usual
- being aware of the available worker's compensation and insurance options available to them

It is also ASLIA policy and regular employers of Sign Language interpreters take steps to create a safe working environment that protects Sign Language interpreters from OOS. This includes:

- undertaking training in occupational health and safety
- identifying and acting on early warning signs

- employers of interpreters, including interpreting agencies, having clear systems in place to allow for the early reporting of OOS symptoms by workers, including the use of an accident or incident book

Trauma. Interpreters may be called upon to work in confronting and emotionally difficult situations resulting in vicarious trauma for interpreters. Furthermore, interpreters can sometimes be the subject of, or witness to a client's or bystander's aggression or anger or be victims of other crimes during or on the way to or from interpreting assignments. It is ASLIA policy that:

- Employers/hirers advise interpreters in advance, where possible, of confronting issues which could arise in a particular situation.
- Employers/hirers provide interpreters with confidential and effective opportunities to debrief, including providing employee assistance schemes.
- Interpreters are able to decline assignments, without being obliged to explain their reasons, unless they wish to.
- Interpreters do not enter clients' homes alone; instead, they should wait for the other party/s to arrive before entering.
- Interpreters consider whether they need to plan an 'escape route' in high-risk assignments.
- Interpreters ensure that at least one other person knows where they are when they are interpreting. Usually, this will be the interpreter's agency; however, in the case of freelance assignments, the interpreter may wish to inform a third party, without disclosing confidential information, of the expected time for completion of the work and any other relevant details.

Environmental hazards. The following environmental hazards can lead to injury or illness in interpreters. Interpreters and their employers/hirers need to manage these hazards in order to minimise risk. These hazards can include, but are not limited to:

- chemicals (e.g. second-hand cigarette smoke, chemical fumes, chalk dust)
- radiation (e.g. x-rays, UV rays from sunshine)
- heat and cold
- trip hazards (e.g. electrical cords, interpreting whilst walking)

- electricity
- noise
- biohazards (e.g. infectious diseases)
- driving (e.g. interpreting or making phone calls while driving)

Educational Interpreting

Owing to the physical and cognitive fatigue which is created for an educational interpreter by the demands of an educative environment with its variable, high speed delivery, special consideration must be given to their working conditions. This consideration may result in working conditions which vary from those outlined in this policy. Careful consideration must be given to whether an educational interpreter can effectively and safely work alone or if it is necessary to employ a second interpreter to allow working as a team. Multiple factors need to be considered in the making of this decision which include, but are not limited to:

- the density and pace of the content
- the overall demands of classroom interaction and participation
- the overall schedule of interpreting that the interpreter may provide on a given day across multiple classes, lessons or lectures
- the amount of time spent in the classroom when students are working individually and independently of instruction

As a general rule, it is ASLIA policy that an educational interpreters not work for longer than 25 minutes of continuous interpreting at any one time before alternating with another interpreter.

Employers of Educational Interpreters. It is ASLIA policy that employers provide the following conditions to ensure a safe working environment for Sign Language interpreters:

- Any audio or video presentation must be clear and of sufficient volume to allow it to be easily heard by the interpreter.
- Where ever possible, captioned video and DVD presentations be used.
- Presentation or classroom content be provided to the interpreter at least 2 days prior to the appointment for preparation purposes.

Resources: Work Place Health and Safety Laws, Regulations and Resources

Commonwealth: <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/SWA>
ACT: http://www.worksafe.act.gov.au/health_safety
Queensland: <http://www.workcoverqld.com.au/>
<http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/index.htm>
New South Wales: <http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>
Northern Territory: <http://www.worksafe.nt.gov.au/home.aspx>
South Australia: <http://www.safework.sa.gov.au/>
<http://www.workcover.com/?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>
Tasmania: <http://workplacestandards.tas.gov.au/home>
<http://www.workcover.tas.gov.au/>
Victoria: <http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/>
Western Australia: <http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/WorkSafe/>
<http://www.workcover.wa.gov.au/Default.htm>

Version History

Version Date	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by motion	Summary of updates
V1. 2012				
V2 2013	Maree Madden			
V3	Paul and Danielle Fried			
V4 and 5 2014	AC			Resources page added.
V6 2018	Danielle Ferndale Gaye Lyons			New template, content removed and re-worded to be 'policy'.