

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

INQUIRY INTO WORKSAFE



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
MONDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2017**

SESSION TWO

Members

**Hon Adele Farina (Chair)
Hon Jacqui Boydell (Deputy Chair)
Hon Ken Baston
Hon Kyle McGinn
Hon Darren West**

Hearing commenced at 12.58 pm

Mrs ALICIA GILMOUR

Customer Help Centre Manager, Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, sworn and examined:

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming in to give evidence before the committee. I formally welcome you to the hearing. The hearing is with the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, WorkSafe division, with the customer help centre manager. I formally welcome you on behalf of the committee. Before we begin, there are a couple of formalities we need to go through.

[Witness took the oath.]

The CHAIR: You will have signed a document titled “Information for Witnesses”. Have you read and understood the document?

Mrs GILMOUR: Yes, I have.

The CHAIR: These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and broadcast on the internet. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you at the conclusion of these hearings. To assist the committee and Hansard, if you refer to a document, can you refer to the full name of the document. Also, could you try to talk into the microphones and not put paper in front of them. If at any time during today’s hearing you would like to evidence to be taken in private, simply indicate that to the committee before you give your evidence and the committee, if it agrees to that request, will go off air and will hear that evidence in private. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript of evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

Before we begin, I would like to invite you to make an opening statement, if you would like to.

Mrs GILMOUR: No, I do not have another statement, other than just to say that I have only been working at WorkSafe since the end of June this year as a level 5.

The CHAIR: That is fine. Alicia, would you mind just running through and describing the role that you have at WorkSafe?

Mrs GILMOUR: Yes, I am the customer help centre manager, so it is a call centre manager-type role. My main responsibilities are people management, managing the daily activities of the team, looking at training, improvements—just the daily management of our small contact centre.

The CHAIR: How many staff work at the customer help centre?

Mrs GILMOUR: We have seven staff who operate the phones, some of those are part time, and I also manage a couple of admin staff.

The CHAIR: What training do customer help centre staff receive and how is it conducted?

Mrs GILMOUR: There is a lot of in-house training. We are currently just looking at that training. Obviously, I am quite new to the role, so I have been looking at what training is there. We have staff who have been there for quite a long time, one as long as 25 years, so our main approach is to do some off-the-phone work, go through some of the policies and procedures, and look at the documentation. That person will then spend some time listening to calls working with a buddy, and

then they will go on calls themselves with a buddy until they feel they are able to take calls on their own.

The CHAIR: Are staff required to undertake regular refresher training?

Mrs GILMOUR: I have not seen a document that states they must receive regular training. Obviously, my role is to ensure that we do have ongoing training, so I will conduct coaching and training myself, and once I know where everybody is at, I can continue to do coaching and feedback as a result of listening to calls and how they manage their roles.

The CHAIR: What procedures are in place to ensure that all the call centre staff follow the procedures and policies?

Mrs GILMOUR: There are procedures within the team. Most of our calls are queries. We have a lot of templates that we have created that staff can refer to to answer the queries. If there is an issue they cannot handle, there is a team leader and they escalate their call to the team leader or ask for the team leader's advice.

The CHAIR: Is there a policy manual of procedures to be followed by the staff?

Mrs GILMOUR: I am just looking into that at the moment to see whether there is a list of policies or procedures for the staff and identifying what those are, getting a list of those together.

The CHAIR: Fundamentally then, staff are working off the templates that have been established?

Mrs GILMOUR: Yes, the templates are a good training tool.

The CHAIR: How many templates are there? You would have one for requests to attend?

Mrs GILMOUR: Yes, we would have a procedure for that.

The CHAIR: Do you have different templates for other types of calls?

Mrs GILMOUR: Yes. There are templates depending on the types of queries that come in. I am not exactly sure, but we have somewhere in the region of hundreds of templates that have been created in conjunction with the operations area to ensure that the responses on those templates are appropriate, correct and up to date.

The CHAIR: How do staff know which template to use if there are so many, if there are hundreds? I did not expect there to be hundreds.

Mrs GILMOUR: They will be listed in the various categories depending on what the queries are. We get a lot of queries about all sorts of different things on worksites—machines, telehandlers—and various queries on licences. There are lots of queries. Sometimes it is just easier to respond orally, although sometimes customers want a response via email. We have a lot of templates.

The CHAIR: What is the procedure when a customer call centre staff member receives a request to attend? What do they do?

Mrs GILMOUR: They will take as much detail as possible about the request to attend, implement information, add information into our WISE system and that information through the WISE system is forwarded to the inspectorate area where it is allocated and handled by the inspectorate.

The CHAIR: Does it go to the director of the inspectorate or does it go to the team leader?

Mrs GILMOUR: It goes to the team manager and it is allocated by team managers.

The CHAIR: So, the director does not see that information?

Mrs GILMOUR: I am not sure whether the director sees that information. They may have access to see that information.

The CHAIR: Is there any difference in the procedure if the request to attend arises as a result of a fatality?

Mrs GILMOUR: Yes, there is a different procedure for fatalities. They are taken, obviously, as a priority. They are passed on to a director immediately and there are also passed on to a number of other various listed people such as media contact, a person at work, the commissioner—there is a list of people. Their names may change over time as to who those people are, but there is a list of people who receive that information. That information is walked around, so it is given priority.

The CHAIR: What is the procedure when a complainant calls asking what action was taken in relation to his or her request to attend, which may have been made some weeks earlier?

Mrs GILMOUR: We take the information from whoever is calling us and check whether or not they have got a reference to the complaint. The information is passed on to the team manager of the inspectorate area and the inspector, if we know who that is. It goes to the inspector, if we know who it is and we cc the manager. If unsure who the inspector is, it is given to the team manager is and dealt with from there.

The CHAIR: If someone contacts the call centre and says, “I lodged this complaint”, and they detail the complaint number, “and I just want to know where things are at”, you are not able to provide that information?

Mrs GILMOUR: No, we are not at the call centre.

The CHAIR: That request for information goes to the team leader?

Mrs GILMOUR: Yes.

The CHAIR: If the complainant says, “I would like to speak to inspector now”, are they able to speak to an inspector?

Mrs GILMOUR: No. We do not usually put them straight through an inspector. Often the inspectors are not available. They may be out on the field. There are processes to email information through.

The CHAIR: How do the staff determine which team leader to refer a call to?

Mrs GILMOUR: The information is in the WISE system. It is split into the various operational areas. It lists who the team manager is in the operations area. If it has already been allocated to an inspector, we can usually see that in WISE, but sometimes maybe it is not or there may be some confusion, so in that case we would go straight to the team manager.

The CHAIR: So, the employee in the call centre is making the call about which inspector to direct the query to?

Mrs GILMOUR: Yes, based on whether it is in construction or what industry it is in or whether it is regional. Once we know it is regional, the system will direct it to the regional area.

The CHAIR: What is the process for ensuring that a request to attend that has been referred to a team manager is actually dealt with, because sometimes things fall through cracks? Is it the role of call centre staff to check that something has been actioned?

Mrs GILMOUR: No, I do not believe it is.

The CHAIR: In the event that a customer help centre staff member receives a very upsetting phone call, either the person has been really abusive or the information that they have received is distressing, what supports are in place at WorkSafe to provide support to that worker?

[1.10 pm]

Mrs GILMOUR: The workers can come off the phone at any point that they feel they need to. There is an escalation process up through the team leader and up through to myself. For the individual, we really take on what it is that they need. Sometimes they just need to have some fresh air or take a walk around and get a coffee. If they need to speak to someone, one of our inspectors can always speak with them as well and support them in that area.

The CHAIR: The committee understands that there is a process for triaging complaints at WorkSafe. Is that triaging done by the call centre staff or is it done by the team leaders?

Mrs GILMOUR: Sorry, what do you mean by triaging the call?

The CHAIR: Determining the priority of the request to attend in terms of whether it is a priority 1 that needs to be responded to immediately or, if you are busy, it can wait until the next day.

Mrs GILMOUR: That is not done by the call centre. That would be done in the inspectorate area.

The CHAIR: In terms of the time allocated by an inspector to respond to a request to attend, that is not done by the call staff?

Mrs GILMOUR: No, it is not done by the call centre.

The CHAIR: When you receive a request from a complainant wanting information about the status of their complaint that they may have lodged a few weeks earlier, what is the process, and do you actually tell them, "Look, you really should lodge a freedom of information application to obtain the information"?

Mrs GILMOUR: Initially, we will take the details and pass it through to our inspectorate area to see if they can respond. We just take the information and pass it through. They are usually advised in their initial call when they make the complaint what the process is. If they want additional details further down the line, they are advised they do have freedom of information that they can utilise.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: While we are talking about that, if someone calls and they have a reference number and you access WISE, would there be any exchange of information at that point, or is the call centre purely an information gathering place and then it is passed on no matter what you can see in WISE? The decision to exchange information is made in the inspectorate, not in the call centre?

Mrs GILMOUR: Yes, not in the call centre; that is correct.

The CHAIR: However, if someone calls in relation to the process for obtaining a licence, you have templates that they can follow?

Mrs GILMOUR: Absolutely, yes.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: With the reference?

Mrs GILMOUR: Yes.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: That is fine.

The CHAIR: Are there any circumstances at all in which the call centre staff will give out information to a caller?

Mrs GILMOUR: For general inquiries, we would give information. For complaints or a request to attend, no, we do not.

The CHAIR: Does the call centre receive complaints about workplace staff?

Mrs GILMOUR: Such as a bullying call or a harassment call, that type of complaint?

The CHAIR: Or somebody is not happy with the way an inspector conducted himself or herself during an inspection, or a complaint that they have made 10 calls and no-one has returned the call?

Mrs GILMOUR: I am not aware of any issues in relation to that, or I am not aware of any calls in relation to someone being not happy with an inspector.

The CHAIR: Is there a procedure for how to deal with those if you do receive a call of that nature?

Mrs GILMOUR: I imagine that we would escalate it to the team leader for review depending on what the issue is. There is also a customer service charter that can be followed if people want to complain after the fact. But certainly since I have started I am not aware of any like that being received.

The CHAIR: So you have no policy manual for your staff to follow?

Mrs GILMOUR: There is a customer service charter, which talks about complaints received from customers in relation to the service provided.

The CHAIR: Would you be able to provide a copy of that charter to the committee?

Mrs GILMOUR: I believe it may have already been provided, but I can find out if it has not and have it provided.

The CHAIR: We will take that as question on notice 1 and we will check that. What is the morale inside WorkSafe and the feeling around the office when you are in the call centre?

Mrs GILMOUR: The morale is very good. The staff are very keen on the role that they have. Most of them have been there for quite some time. They enjoy their role and they enjoy being able to help people. The morale is very good.

The CHAIR: Having come into WorkSafe just recently and having had an opportunity to assess its processes, are there any improvements that you think could be made in the terms of the way the call centre interacts with customers?

Mrs GILMOUR: Currently, all I have really been looking at has been mainly focused on the training that is already there and trying to identify what improvements I could make in relation to training and providing information with a first point-of-call resolution approach, so to eliminate, where possible, transferring calls to other areas such as the licensing team. At this stage, I have not really been there long enough to identify any other improvements so far.

The CHAIR: The committee has heard lots of evidence about the WISE system being outdated, very old and not really fit for purpose. What is your experience in using the WISE system?

Mrs GILMOUR: I have not used the WISE system in depth myself. It is mainly used when people are on the phone, taking a call and entering information whilst they are on the phone. So far it seems to be fit for purpose from what I can see, but obviously, being quite new, I might be missing something.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: You said in the beginning that you have been in this role as a level 5 since June. Does that mean you were with WorkSafe prior to that but at a different level?

Mrs GILMOUR: No, I was not.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: So you have come from outside?

Mrs GILMOUR: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you mind me asking if you have operated in a call centre previously?

Mrs GILMOUR: Yes, I have.

The CHAIR: Were those processes very similar to the way the WorkSafe call centre operates?

Mrs GILMOUR: I would say they are, yes.

The CHAIR: From your experience in other call centres, are there any processes for triaging or organising complaints that you think work well and should be adopted by WorkSafe?

Mrs GILMOUR: I would need to take more time in the role to fully understand the complaints and our triage process and whether we could make additional improvements.

The CHAIR: Alicia, that is it. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee and giving evidence. Are there any comments that you would like to make in concluding?

Mrs GILMOUR: No, I do not have any additional comments.

The CHAIR: Thank you for attending today. A transcript of your evidence will be sent to you for correction. If you believe that any corrections are needed, either typographical or transcription errors, just mark those on the transcript and return it to the staff and then we can consider those amendments. If we do not already have that call centre service charter, then if you could provide that it would be appreciated. If there is any additional information that you would like to provide or if you would like to elaborate on any of the points that you made today, you may do so by providing supplementary information to the committee. Thank you very much and the hearing is now closed.

Hearing concluded at 1.19 pm
