

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING

# WORK

METHOD STATEMENTS IN PLAIN ENGLISH

**GUIDELINES** FEBRUARY 1998  
BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

**Disclaimer**

This publication may contain occupational health and safety and workers compensation information. It may include some of your obligations under the various legislations that WorkCover NSW administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate legislation.

Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website ([www.legislation.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au)) or by contacting the free hotline service on 02 9321 3333.

This publication does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law as it applies to particular problems or to individuals or as a substitute for legal advice. You should seek independent legal advice if you need assistance on the application of the law to your situation.

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# INTRODUCTION

## **Why do we need work method statements?**

*The purpose of a work method statement is:*

- to outline a safe method of work for a specific job
- to provide an induction document that workers must read and understand before starting a job
- to meet legal requirements, that is, hazard identification and control
- to program work, materials, time, staff, and to anticipate possible problems
- to use as a tool in quality assurance.

*Remember that a work method statement is part of a site safety plan. This plan should include:*

- Induction Training
- Register of Hazardous Substances
- Work Method Statement
- OHS Procedures
- Responsibilities Flow Chart
- Rehabilitation Policy.

There is a growing need for companies to write work method statements in plain English. These procedures must be readily understood by all employees, including employees with low literacy/numeracy skills. The aim of this document is to provide you with ideas and suggestions to help you write work method statements in an easy to read style, that is, in plain English.

If you take time and care to prepare clear and concise site specific work method statements you can save your company valuable time and money. These savings return greater profits.

We hope that the suggestions in this booklet will assist writers of work method statements to use language and formatting that is concise, clear and easily understood.

## **PART A:**

### **Suggested proforma**

The proforma on the following pages covers all the main points required by major contractors and the law. In it we have suggested ways of filling in each section.

### **Explaining the proforma**

Write all your work method statements after consulting the workers who are going to use them. You may then need to redraft them to include their suggestions. They may see a better and safer way of doing the job.

Workers will be more willing to take ownership of the documents and act on them if they participate in planning and writing them.

We designed the proforma to fit A4 paper. It is double sided. This overcomes the problems of having more than one sheet of paper to deal with. However, you could add extra pages if there is not enough space in any one section.

In the proforma the procedures, possible hazards and safety controls are printed side by side. This will make it easier for you to consider the possible hazards for each step. Then you can decide on the appropriate controls to overcome each hazard.

All employees should be aware that there are work method statements and that they **must see and sign them**.

## Work Method Statement (Part 1)

<b>Contractor:</b>			<b>Signed Off:</b> _____	
<b>Project:</b>			<b>Date:</b> _____	<b>No:</b> _____
<b>Job</b>			<b>Accepted:</b> _____	<b>Yes / No</b>
<b>Procedure (in steps):</b>	<b>Possible Hazards:</b>	<b>Safety Controls:</b>		
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				
13.				
14.				
15.				



<b>Work Method Statement (Part 1)</b>		Signed Off: _____
<b>Contractor:</b> <i>Put the name of your organisation here.</i>		Date: _____ No: _____
<b>Project:</b> <i>Put the name of the building you are working on here.</i>		Accepted: _____ Yes / No
<b>Job:</b> <i>Write in the task or job that you are doing.</i>		Area: _____
<b>Procedure (in steps):</b>	<b>Possible Hazards:</b>	<b>Safety Controls:</b>
1. <i>Write out the job step by step</i>	<i>Include all possible hazards such as:</i>	<i>List all safety controls such as:</i>
2. <i>Start each step with an action word. For example</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hazardous substances, explosives, dust, etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MSDS</li> </ul>
3. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fix hand rail to stair well walls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manual handling, lifting heavy weights (15kg?)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warning Signs</li> </ul>
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twisting, pushing and pulling, lifting and carrying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal protective equipment</li> </ul>
5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hazards to others in area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fellow workers/public safety provisions</li> </ul>
6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rubbish, electrical, fills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Storage of materials and equipment</li> </ul>
7.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housekeeping</li> </ul>
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		

## Work Method Statement (Part 2)

Personal Qualifications and Experience:	Personnel, Duties and Responsibilities:	Training Required to Complete Work:
<p>You will need to list all the details of qualifications and experience you and your workers will need for the job. Include: trade certificates, WorkCover tickets, demolition licences for contractor. Experience may cover previous work done in the area that may not require certificates or licences.</p>	<p>Give details of the duties and specific responsibilities of supervisors and other personnel. For example, describe such things as daily safety check of the work area by leading hand. You might like to include on a separate sheet, a flow chart showing the structure of your organisation and include the responsibilities of each person in that structure</p>	<p>Make sure that all workers and their supervisors are trained in the procedures needed to complete the job safely, especially where you are using new or changed work methods.</p>
<p><b>Engineering Details/Certificates/WorkCover Approvals:</b></p>	<p><b>Codes of Practice, Legislation:</b></p>	<p><b>Codes of Practice, Legislation:</b></p>
<p>Give details that might be required for demolition, precast panel erection, structural steel erection. Certificates may be needed for formwork – falsework, machinery on suspended slabs, point loading on suspended slabs and WorkCover approval of machine-felling for demolition work.</p>	<p>Are relevant codes of practice available on site? Is the work method equal to or better than any applicable codes of practice for the job to be done? Do procedures agree with relevant legislation?</p>	<p>Are relevant codes of practice available on site? Is the work method equal to or better than any applicable codes of practice for the job to be done? Do procedures agree with relevant legislation?</p>
<p><b>Plant/Equipment:</b></p>	<p><b>Maintenance Checks:</b></p>	<p><b>Maintenance Checks:</b></p>
<p>List plant and equipment that you use on the job, e.g. ladders, scaffold trestles, grinders, electrical leads and equipment, formwork materials shoring materials, oxy set, welding machines, fire extinguishers, etc.</p>	<p>Include: maintenance on cranes, forklift, monthly check on all electrical equipment and necessary tags, etc</p>	<p>Include: maintenance on cranes, forklift, monthly check on all electrical equipment and necessary tags, etc</p>
<p><b>Read and Signed by All Employees on Site:</b></p>		

## **PART B:**

### **Points to remember when writing work method statements in plain English:**

“Plain English is getting a clear message across to your audience in an appropriate way. This means being clear about what you want to say, who you’re saying it to and how you’re going to say it. Plain English is effective communication”. NSW Adult Literacy Council

#### **Plain English means:**

- considering the reader
- communicating a clear message to the reader
- using clear, concise language
- rethinking how information is presented so that it attracts the reader.

#### **Plain English does not mean:**

- writing in simple English
- using the minimum amount of words
- getting rid of technical language
- talking down to the reader
- losing meaning.

#### **Plain English has many benefits:**

- Workers are more likely to read and act on written texts
- Readers are less frustrated and view documents in a more positive way
- There is less interruption to work from queries and misunderstandings
- Documents take less time to produce
- Safety and quality can be improved
- Training is easier and more time efficient.

#### **Audience:**

Keep in mind the personnel who are going to read the work method statement and consider these questions:

- How well do they read? (educational background)
- Are they from a non-English speaking background?

## Seven ways to write effectively:

Now we will look at seven ways to write work method statements effectively in plain English. These will make your work method statements easier to write and understand. The seven ways to write effectively are:

1. **Write out the job procedure step by step** ..... page 9
2. **Use active, not passive voice** ..... page 10
3. **Sequence ideas logically**..... page 10
4. **Keep sentences short and clear** ..... page 11
5. **Choose words carefully**..... page 12
6. **Use verbs not nouns** ..... page 13
7. **Consider layout and formatting** ..... page 13

### 1. Write out the job procedure step by step

**Start each step with an action word.**

**Set it out as shown in the *Procedure Section* of the *Suggested Proforma* on page 5.**

#### Examples

*Example 1:*

1. **Deliver** all duct to the site.
2. **Store** in areas set aside by the builder.
3. **Clear** work area of all obstacles.
4. **Join** ductwork on floor in lengths less than nine metres.

*Example 2:*

1. **Locate** centre of each hole.
2. **Check** that each hole would only penetrate the slab thickness.
3. **Drill** an 8 to 10 mm pilot hole.
4. **Insert** a small wire or rod through each hole.

*Example 3:*

1. **Erect** and **brace** columns.
2. **Erect** and **brace** beams.
3. **Tie** beams and bracing.
4. **Bridge** purlins.
5. **Tension** bolts.

## 2. Use active, not passive voice

**Use active, not passive voice. It is more personal and direct and specifies who must do the action.**

*Examples:*

- ✗ Materials **must be removed** in manageable lots.
- ✓ **Remove** materials in manageable lots.
- ✗ Protective gloves **are to be worn**.
- ✓ **Wear** protective gloves.
- ✗ Fork lifts must not **be driven** faster than walking speed.
- ✓ **Never drive** forklifts faster than walking speed.
- ✗ Leads **are to be kept** above floor level.
- ✓ **Keep** leads above floor level.
- ✗ All equipment **to be checked** and **tested**.
- ✓ **Check** and **test** all equipment.

## 3. Sequence ideas logically

### (i) Put the main idea first

*Examples:*

- ✗ When you are working in a dusty and windy area, **wear** safety glasses.
- ✓ **Wear** safety glasses when you are working in a dusty and windy area.
- ✗ From the information on the plan, **establish** the required width of the formwork.
- ✓ **Establish** the required width of the formwork from the information on the plan.

### (ii) Put the time phrase, if important, as a sub-heading and then the instructions in point form underneath.

*Example:*

When cutting, drilling or shaping glasswool insulation:

- a) **wear** protective clothing
- b) **use** a suitable dust mask
- c) **avoid** contact with your eyes.

### (iii) Try to put information in point form for clear and easy reading.

*Example:*

- ✗ When compressed air jack hammers are to be employed for the purpose of excavation, it is advisable to make certain that the air compressor is placed within as close a proximity as practicable to the worksite and all equipment is to be fitted with suitable apparatus for noise abatement. Hearing protection is to be worn by all employees at all times and air hoses are to be fitted with snap-on safety couplings which are to be fixed to the hose by the use of safety locking pins.

- ✓ When using jack hammers for excavation work:
  - a) **place** the compressor as close to the work as possible
  - b) **make sure** that the equipment is fitted with noise controls
  - c) **wear** hearing protection
  - d) **use** snap-on safety couplings on all hoses
  - e) **fix** safety couplings with safety locking pins.

(iv) **Separate any extra information that may be needed to make the instruction clear. Do this by putting the extra information in a highlighted box or by using italics.**

*Example:*

Block off fixed type laser beams by using a beam stop.

**Safety Note**

Effective beam stops have a matt finish to stop reflection. Earth, wood, plywood, brick, mortar, concrete or plasterboard surfaces are suitable.

Roughen the surface of metal beam stops.

(v) **Use parallel structures - that is use the same grammatical structure to express similar ideas or two or more ideas in the same sentence.**

*Example:*

- ✗ To prevent falls:
  - **fix** solid one metre high guard rail
  - **workers must use** a safety harness
  - **workers wearing** safety footwear
  - securely **covering** all floor penetrations
- ✓ To prevent falls:
  - **fix** solid one metre high guard rail
  - **use** safety harness
  - **wear** safety footwear
  - **cover** all floor penetrations securely.

#### 4. **Keep sentences short and clear**

**Remember:**

- a) **Long and/or complex sentences are more difficult to understand. They take longer to read and can hide information.**
- b) **A sentence should contain only one or two ideas. Separate ideas with lists, dot points and punctuation (commas, semi-colons, colons).**
- c) **If you must have a long sentence (more than 18 words), follow it with a short one.**

*Example:*

✘ The trainer will ensure that each crane driver/chaser is fully skilled in lifting procedures and, most importantly, will confirm that each crane driver/chaser fully understands what his duties are.

✔ Trainers must make sure that crane drivers/chasers:

- a) know correct lifting procedures
- b) fully understand their duties.

## 5. Choose words carefully

### (i) Don't use too many formal words or long winded phrases. (See Appendix 1)

*Examples:*

✘ ensure

✔ make sure

✘ accordingly

✔ so

✘ without further delay

✔ immediately

✘ at this point in time

✔ now.

### (ii) Avoid unnecessary repetition or redundancies. (See Appendix 2)

*Examples:*

✘ Power to the construction site is available **on an around the clock basis**.

✔ Power to the construction site is available 24 hours a day.

### (iii) Do not use too many nouns together - they can make the document difficult to understand because the reader must take in a lot of information in a short space.

*Examples:*

✘ safety regulation handbook

✔ handbook of safety rules

✘ estimated monthly attendance performance bonus

✔ monthly attendance bonus.

### (iv) Avoid jargon, slang, idioms, sexist or racist terms, and foreign expressions.

*Examples:*

a) chippie, sparky, gofer

b) I'm broke

c) as slow as a snail

d) foreman

e) déjà vu.

- (v) **Do not use contractions (short forms). They are not as strong as the words written in full.**

*Example:*

- ✗ Don't
- ✓ Do not.

- (vi) **Beware of acronyms (words made from initials) - you must explain what they mean the first time you use them.**

*Example:*

Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU).

- (vii) **Spell out abbreviations to avoid confusion whenever possible. If you must abbreviate:**

- a) **do so only when necessary, and**
- b) **make sure that the abbreviations are understood.**

*Examples:*

- ✗ e.g.
- ✓ for example
- ✗ i.e.
- ✓ that is.

- (viii) **Spell out one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine and ten. Over ten, use numbers -11,12,13 .....**

- (ix) **Use spelling from the Macquarie Dictionary. It is the most suitable for Australia.**

## 6. Use verbs not nouns

**Be careful of turning verbs into nouns (nominalisation). This makes the document “heavy” or “academic” and hard to read.**

*(See Appendix 3 for a list)*

*Examples:*

- ✗ **Utilisation** of backhoes on construction sites must only be done in **consultation** with supervisor.
- ✓ **Consult** supervisors before **using** backhoes on construction sites.
- ✗ **Failure** to comply with these directives will result in **expulsion** from this facility and/or **notification** of the construction company.
- ✓ We will **expel** you from this site and **notify** the construction company if you do not comply with these directives.

## 7. Consider layout and formatting

- **Keep your layout open.** Use plenty of white space. This makes the procedure more readable.
- **Use no more than two separate font styles:** one **Bold** and the other *Italic*. If you use more, the finished product will not present well.

- **Avoid using CAPITALS to write full words** - THEY ARE MORE DIFFICULT TO READ.
- **Do not use underlining**. Make important headings larger instead.
- **Justify (line up) the text to the left** as this helps you to read the document more easily.
- **Use a serif rather than a sans serif font**. Again, it is easier to read.

*For example:*

- ✗ Supply eye protectors to operators, other workers and visitors where there are eye hazards. Always wear eye protectors.
- ✓ Supply eye protectors to operators, other workers and visitors where there are eye hazards. Always wear eye protectors.

- **Learn how to use your keyboard to its full capacity**. There are many features that can be used to give a more professional finish.
- **Take care with the length of lines**. 50 - 70 characters is the ideal number of characters per line.
- **Use subheadings to help break up large blocks of text and guide the reader to the information**.
- **Use colour sparingly**. It is harder to read than black and white.
- **Make sure graphics are easy to understand**.
- **Keep layout consistent** throughout the document.
- **If you need to include a glossary of technical terms make sure that you follow the agreed layout**.

**Finally, get somebody who does not know the job to read the work method statement. You have achieved a satisfactory result if they understand it.**

### **Alternatives to Writing:**

It is very important to consider alternatives to writing if you have employees who have reading problems. They may not be able to read words but they may be able to follow a picture, a diagram or spoken instructions.

Use alternatives to writing if these convey the meaning more easily:

- Flow charts for writing work instructions and procedures, explaining processes, defining production goals
- Diagrams, illustrations, graphics, line drawings for technical terminology and procedures
- Tables, charts, graphs (pie, vertical, line etc.) for statistics, production data and figures
- Maps for emergency procedures, locations and layout of areas.

*Or*

**Read the work method statement to employees and check that they have understood it. Make sure that they then sign it.**

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### Formal words and long winded phrases

<i>Use these</i>	<i>instead of these</i>
no	absence of
so, therefore	accordingly
follow	adhere to
changes	adjustments
manage	administer
give, divide	allocate
clear, plain	apparent
when necessary	as applicable
later	at a later time
always	at all times
now	at the present time
because	because of the fact that
by	by means of
since, because	by virtue of the fact
work out	calculate
start	commence
complete	complete in all respects
has	contain
now	currently
make less, reduce	decrease
despite	despite the fact that
shown	described herein
stop, end	discontinue
send	dispatch
because, since	due to the fact that
length of	duration of
inside, within	encase
exit	egress
make sure	ensure
work out	estimate
check	examine
leave out	exclude
show, tell	explain
for	for the purpose of

<b><i>Use these</i></b>	<b><i>instead of these</i></b>
because	for this reason
later	further down the track
need	have to
causing	giving rise to
same	identical
at once	immediately
according to	in accordance with
and	in addition
with	in conjunction with
about	in reference to
about	regarding
finally	in the final analysis
soon	in the near future
now	in this day and age
considering	in view of
if	in the event that
look at, check	inspect
tell	notify
see, adhere to, obey	observe
regularly	on a regular basis
before	prior to
part	portion
rules, ways	procedures
why	reason for
fix	rectify
move	relocate
need, want, must	require
needing	requiring
must	required to
must	shall
to	so as to
after	subsequent to
job	task to be performed
the kind of	the nature of
use	utilise
when	whilst, while
could, might	with a potential to
immediately	without further delay

## APPENDIX 2

### Redundancies - unnecessary repetitions

<i>Use these</i>	<i>instead of these</i>
essential	absolutely essential
adequate	adequate enough
warning	advance warning
fundamentals	basic fundamentals
big	big in size
combined	combined together
eliminate	completely eliminate
component	component part
consensus	consensus of opinion
continue	continue on
cooperate	cooperate together
each	each and every
result	end result
identical	exactly identical
outcome	final outcome
thanks	grateful thanks
few	few in number
green hat	green coloured hat
inventory	inventory stock
cooperation	mutual cooperation
action required	necessary action required
prerequisite	necessary prerequisite
beginning	new beginning
first hand	on a first hand basis
history	past history
period	period of time
reason	reason why
red	red in colour
refer	refer back
repeat	repeat again
schedule	time schedule
little	tiny little
total	total and utter
facts	true facts

## APPENDIX 3

### Verb forms for commonly used nouns

<b>Use these verbs</b>	<b>instead of these nouns</b>
anchor	anchorage
act	action
alter	alteration
apply	application
analyse	analysis
assess	assessment
assist	assistance
attach	attachment
complete	completion
comply	compliance
connect	connection
construct	construction
erect	erection
examine	examination
expose	exposure
fail	failure
identify	identification
improve	improvement
inform	information
install	installation
isolate	isolation
investigate	investigation
maintain	maintenance
organise	organisation
place	placement
position	positioning
prepare	preparation
project	projection
protect	protection
recognise	recognition
reduce	reduction
reject	rejection
remove	removal
specify	specification
supervise	supervision
terminate	termination
train	training
vary	variation

## APPENDIX 4 - CHECKLIST

### Check List - Writing Effective Work Method Statements

Have you:	Yes/No	Comments
kept your sentences short and clear? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• eliminated unnecessary words</li> <li>• avoided using too many clauses in a sentence</li> </ul>		
used active not passive voice?		
sequenced your information logically?		
chosen your words carefully? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• used words familiar to employees</li> <li>• used consistent language</li> <li>• avoided using idioms</li> <li>• explained acronyms and abbreviations</li> <li>• defined technical words (used a glossary)</li> <li>• standardised modality (must, should)</li> </ul>		
used verbs not nouns for actions?		
avoided using strings of nouns?		
considered alternatives to writing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diagrams, graphics, charts, tables, maps, flow charts</li> </ul>		
followed the agreed format? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• layout</li> <li>• style guide</li> </ul>		
observed copyright laws? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acknowledged sources</li> </ul>		

## WorkCover Offices

For all occupational health and safety, workers compensation and rehabilitation information, call the WorkCover Information Line – 13 10 50 from anywhere in New South Wales.

### HEAD OFFICE

Office Hours 8:30am – 5:00pm  
Monday to Friday  
92–100 Donnison Street  
GOSFORD 2250  
Phone (02) 4321 5000  
Fax (02) 4325 4145  
Postal Address  
WorkCover NSW Locked Bag 2906  
Lisarow NSW 2252

### WorkCover Assistance Service

Office Hours 8:30am – 4:30pm  
Monday to Friday  
92–100 Donnison Street  
GOSFORD 2250  
Phone 13 10 50

### LABORATORIES

#### Thornleigh

5A Pioneer Avenue  
THORNLEIGH 2120  
Phone (02) 9484 6655  
Fax (02) 9980 6849  
Email lab@workcover.nsw.gov.au

#### Londonderry

TestSafe Australia  
Ground Floor 919 Londonderry Road  
LONDONDERRY 2753  
Phone (02) 4724 4900  
Fax (02) 4724 4999  
Email testsafe@workcover.nsw.gov.au

### REGIONAL and LOCAL OFFICES

Office Hours 8:30am – 4:30pm  
Monday to Friday

### REGIONAL OFFICES

#### Newcastle

956 Hunter Street  
NEWCASTLE WEST 2302  
Phone (02) 4921 2900  
Fax (02) 4921 2929

#### Wollongong

106 Market Street  
WOLLONGONG 2500  
Phone (02) 4222 7333  
Fax (02) 4226 9087

### LOCAL OFFICES

#### Albury

463 Kiewa Street  
ALBURY 2640  
Phone (02) 6021 5911  
Fax (02) 6041 2580

#### Batemans Bay

Shop 6, Fenning Place  
12 Orient Street  
BATEMANS BAY 2536  
Phone (02) 4472 5544  
Fax (02) 4472 5060

#### Blacktown

125 Main Street  
BLACKTOWN 2148  
Phone (02) 9671 8701  
Fax (02) 9831 8246

#### Dubbo

Suite 3, 157 Brisbane Street  
DUBBO 2830  
Phone (02) 6884 2799  
Fax (02) 6884 2808

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Phone (02) 4822 1243  
Fax (02) 4822 1242

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Fax (02) 6641 5100

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Phone (02) 6964 2027  
Fax (02) 6964 1738

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Level 4, 4-8 Woodville Street  
HURSTVILLE 2220  
Phone (02) 9598 3366  
Fax (02) 9585 0261

#### Lindfield

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Phone (02) 9936 3000  
Fax (02) 9936 3030

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Manchester Unity Building  
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Phone (02) 6622 0088  
Fax (02) 6622 0090

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Fax (02) 9827 8690

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Level 1, 55 Maitland Street  
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Fax (02) 6792 3532

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956 Hunter Street  
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Fax (02) 4921 2929

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Fax (02) 9841 8490

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Phone (02) 6584 1188  
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Shellharbour Square  
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Fax (02) 4296 8914

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Fax (02) 4950 5587

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Fax (07) 5536 4389

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WAGGA WAGGA 2650  
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Fax (02) 6937 3616

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106 Market Street  
WOLLONGONG 2500  
Phone (02) 4222 7333  
Fax (02) 4226 9087

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