



What it takes to be a Dogged Safety Champion

We recently came across the true story of a courageous Safety Champion who refused to be diverted from his commitment to carrying out his responsibilities to those in his care. The events in this inspiring story took place during the devastating October 2017 bushfires in California.

The surprise is that the Safety Champion is a dog and what he did is somewhat aligned to the duty of care of a Worker under the WHS Act. The story may be a useful analogy or inspiration to Managers and Supervisors about their WHS duties.

The Safety Champion

The Safety Champion in this story is a Great Pyrenees Mountain Dog called Odin. The Great Pyrenees is a breed that has a centuries old history that goes back to being trained and used to guard flocks of sheep and goats from wolves and bears in the French Pyrenees. The breed is well known as a committed protector of small animals and young children.

Odin lived and worked on a small property in California and his job was to look after a flock of goats. When the October 2017 bushfires in California reached the property the owners realised they would have to abandon their farm. They wanted to take Odin with them but had no way to take the goats as well. But Odin simply refused to go with them and abandon the goats. Very reluctantly the owners had to leave him even though they realised they may never see him alive again.

The bushfires were devastating and claimed 40 lives including one of the owners' neighbours. It destroyed many homes and caused billions of dollars in damage. As soon as the bushfires had subsided somewhat, the owners managed to get back to their property. They found their buildings were ruined and they had suffered millions of dollars in property damage.

Suddenly the flock of goats appeared. They were under the charge of Odin who had also adopted several baby reindeer into the flock under his safety protection. One goat had a minor burn. Odin's fur was singed, his whiskers had melted and he was limping.

Odin and the Duties of Workers – Section 28 of the WHS Act

The WHS Act requires that;

“While at work, a worker must:

(a) take reasonable care for his or her own health and safety, and

(b) take reasonable care that his or her acts or omissions do not adversely affect the health and safety of other persons, and

(c) comply, so far as the worker is reasonably able, with any reasonable instruction that is given by the person conducting the business or undertaking to allow the person to comply with this Act, and

(d) co-operate with any reasonable policy or procedure of the person conducting the business or undertaking relating to health or safety at the workplace that has been notified to workers.”

We can't say that what Odin did aligned exactly with the WHS duties of a Worker. He did go beyond taking "reasonable care" but he was certainly outstanding in taking care that his actions or omissions did not adversely affect the health and safety of others.

And his qualities and performance as a leader were exceptional. Commitment, courage, leading by example, concern for the health and safety of others, and getting the job done with the minimum risk to others, all come easily to mind when considering what Odin did.

And we have used the word dogged in the title of this article as it nicely describes Odin. He was dogged because he was resolute, strongwilled and tenacious in achieving the safety of his flock.

Note

The full story that was published in *Modern Farmer* with photos of Odin and his goats can be found at this link; <https://modernfarmer.com/2017/10/guard-dog-wouldnt-leave-goat-flock-california-fires-lived-tell-story/>

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