

Occupational Hygienist interview questions

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What to expect

The interview process for an occupational hygienist typically assesses your technical knowledge, your ability to apply standards in practice, and how you work with others to control risks. You can expect a mix of technical, behavioural, and scenario-based questions, often in a panel format.

- **Technical:** Questions that probe your understanding of exposure assessment, monitoring methods, and Australian exposure standards.
- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask you to describe past experiences, often using the STAR method, to assess how you communicate and influence stakeholders.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations that test your judgement under pressure and your ability to prioritise immediate risks.
- **Process:** Questions about how you would plan and conduct a hygiene survey or investigation from start to finish.
- **Safety and compliance:** Questions about your knowledge of WHS legislation and your role in ensuring compliance.

Interviews are usually conducted by a panel that may include a senior hygienist, a WHS manager, and sometimes an operations manager. The process often starts with a phone screen, followed by a face-to-face or video interview. Some employers include a practical exercise, such as interpreting a set of monitoring results or reviewing a case study. You may also be asked to give a short presentation on a relevant topic.

1. Walk me through how you would conduct a baseline occupational hygiene survey for a new manufacturing site.

Why they ask

This question assesses your systematic approach to identifying and evaluating hazards, which is core to the role.

How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step walk-through. Start with a desktop review, then site walk-through, hazard identification, sampling strategy, and reporting.

Example answer

"First, I would review the site's processes, safety data sheets, and any existing monitoring data. Then I would conduct a walk-through with the site WHS representative to identify potential hazards such as dust, noise, and chemical exposures. Based on that, I would develop a sampling plan, prioritising areas with the highest risk. I would use personal monitoring and direct-reading instruments to measure exposures, ensuring I follow relevant Australian standards. After the survey, I would interpret the results against the Workplace Exposure Standards, prepare a report with clear recommendations, and discuss the findings with management to agree on control measures."

2. Tell me about a time when you had to communicate complex exposure data to a non-technical audience. How did you ensure they understood?

Why they ask

This question assesses your communication skills, which are vital when advising employers and workers about risks.

How to structure your answer

Use the STAR method: describe the situation, the task, the action you took, and the result.

Example answer

"At a previous construction project, I had to explain the results of silica monitoring to a group of site supervisors who were not familiar with exposure standards. The situation was that several workers had exceeded the standard, and I needed to gain their buy-in for new controls. My task was to make the data understandable and actionable. I prepared a simple one-page summary that showed the exposure levels compared to the standard using a clear chart, avoiding jargon. I also ran a toolbox talk to explain what silica is, why it matters, and what controls we would implement. As a result, the supervisors understood the urgency and cooperated fully. We implemented water suppression and extraction, and follow-up monitoring showed exposures were controlled."

3. You are called to a construction site where workers are complaining of headaches and dizziness. The area is known to have solvent vapours. How would you assess and manage the situation?

Why they ask

This question tests your ability to respond to a potential acute health hazard, prioritising immediate safety while investigating.

How to structure your answer

Describe your immediate actions, then your investigation, and finally your recommendations. Show judgement under pressure.

Example answer

"First, I would ensure the safety of the workers. I would ask the site supervisor to evacuate the immediate area and increase ventilation if possible. I would check if anyone needs medical attention. Then I would don appropriate PPE and use a direct-reading gas detector to assess the solvent vapour levels. If levels are high, I would keep the area clear and investigate the source, such as a leak or inadequate ventilation. I would also review safety data sheets and the hazardous substances register. After the immediate risk is controlled, I would conduct personal monitoring to assess exposure over a full shift. Finally, I would recommend engineering controls, such as improved local exhaust ventilation, and work with the site to implement them. I would also suggest health surveillance if needed."

4. How do you interpret personal monitoring results against Australian exposure standards? What factors do you consider?

Why they ask

This question directly assesses your technical knowledge of exposure standards and your ability to apply them in practice.

How to structure your answer

Explain the key concepts: time-weighted average, peak exposures, and how you compare results. Mention relevant standards and considerations.

Example answer

"When interpreting personal monitoring results, I compare the measured concentration to the Workplace Exposure Standards, which are time-weighted averages over an eight-hour shift. I also consider short-term exposure limits for substances that have them, and peak exposures that might cause acute effects. I check whether the sampling was representative of the worker's full shift, including tasks and breaks. I also look at the limit of detection and any analytical uncertainty. If results are above the standard, I assess the adequacy of existing controls and recommend improvements. I document everything clearly and discuss the findings with the employer and workers."

5. What are your responsibilities under the WHS Act and Regulations as an occupational hygienist?

Why they ask

This question ensures you understand the legal framework you work within, which is essential for compliance and risk management.

How to structure your answer

List key duties: identifying hazards, assessing risks, advising on controls, and ensuring compliance. Mention specific regulations for hazardous substances and noise.

Example answer

"Under the WHS Act, I have a duty to ensure my own actions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others, and to cooperate with my employer on WHS matters. More specifically, as an occupational hygienist, I help the PCBU meet their duties by identifying health hazards, assessing exposure risks, and recommending control measures. I ensure that monitoring is conducted according to relevant standards, such as AS/NZS 1269 for noise and the Workplace Exposure Standards for airborne contaminants. I also advise on compliance with regulations for hazardous substances, including maintaining a register and safety data sheets, and I help develop health surveillance programs where required."

6. How do you handle a situation where a client or employer is reluctant to implement controls you have recommended due to cost or disruption?

Why they ask

This question assesses your ability to influence and negotiate, which is crucial when recommendations may be seen as costly or disruptive.

How to structure your answer

Describe your approach to understanding concerns, presenting evidence, and finding practical solutions. Use a persuasive, collaborative tone.

Example answer

"First, I listen to their concerns to understand the barriers. Often it is about cost or production downtime. I then explain the risks in plain terms, focusing on the health consequences and the legal obligations under WHS legislation. I present the evidence from monitoring and the potential consequences of inaction, such as regulatory fines or worker illness. I work with them to explore options, starting with lower-cost controls like administrative changes or improved work practices, and then look at engineering solutions that might have longer-term benefits. I also highlight successful examples from similar workplaces. My goal is to find a solution that protects workers while being practical for the business. If needed, I involve the WHS manager or worker representatives to build support."