

Complaints Management (External) Policy

Issues and Complaints Resolution | Version 1

26/03/2026

Acknowledgement of Country

SafeWork NSW acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that contributed to the development of this Proposal.

We advise this resource may contain images, or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

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More information

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Introduction

SafeWork NSW is committed to fostering an environment where feedback and complaints are welcomed as an essential part of effective regulation and service delivery. We believe in promoting a positive complaints management culture and encourage workers, employees, and members of the community to raise concerns and provide feedback. We approach these matters with fairness, respect and timeliness so people can be confident their issues are taken seriously.

Complaints provide valuable insights that help SafeWork NSW to:

- Identify risks, trends and opportunities for continuous improvement of our services
- Strengthen stakeholder engagement by addressing community concerns and building trust in workplace safety systems
- Take targeted compliance and enforcement actions to address identified hazards and prevent harm

We understand that trust in SafeWork NSW is closely linked to how complaints are managed. We commit to managing complaints with transparency, clarity, and accuracy so that our customers understand how their complaint will be assessed and resolved.

There are several teams within SafeWork NSW who may manage and respond to your complaint in the first instance, depending on the nature of the concern. The Issues and Complaints Resolution team also plays a key role in ensuring escalated, complex or serious complaints about our services, regulatory activities, employees, and complaint handling practices are addressed appropriately. By managing complaints in a consistent, impartial, and professional manner, we support continuous improvement and help maintain confidence in SafeWork NSW and the NSW Government.

Scope

This policy applies to all external complaints received by SafeWork NSW regarding its services, regulatory activities, employees, and complaint handling practices. All complaints submitted by customers and members of the community through any channel, including phone, email, online forms, and social media are covered by this policy.

For the purposes of this policy, the use of the term ‘customer’ includes complainants, Duty Holders, Persons Conducting Business or Undertaking (PCBU’s), workers, employers, union representatives and members of the community.

It applies to all SafeWork NSW staff, consultants, contractors, and external providers acting on behalf of SafeWork NSW.

Excluded from this scope are:

- Internal staff grievances (managed under the SafeWork NSW Internal Grievance Management Policy)
- Public Interest Disclosures (managed under the Department of Customer Service Public Interest Disclosure Policy)

- Access to information requests under GIPA legislation (Managed by the SafeWork NSW Right to Information team)
- Matters under investigation by other statutory bodies such as the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the NSW Ombudsman or the NSW Resources Regulator
- Formal appeals or tribunal processes governed by separate legislation such as internal reviews of Inspector and Regulator decisions.

Complaints we handle vs. complaints we refer

We handle complaints about SafeWork NSW including our regulatory activities, services, staff and complaint handling. If a complaint relates to another regulator or provider outside of SafeWork NSW, we will provide information, coordinate (where appropriate), or transfer the matter to the responsible body. We may also refer complaints to other external agencies or oversight bodies such as the NSW Ombudsman, Independent Commission Against Corruption or the NSW Resources Regulator if we assess it is appropriate or required under legislation.

If a matter falls into an excluded category, we will redirect it to the appropriate team and inform you of the appropriate team to handle the matter.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline SafeWork NSW's commitment to effective complaint management. It establishes the principles that guide how complaints are received, assessed, and managed to ensure all complaints are handled in a fair, transparent, and timely manner.

This policy supports confidence in SafeWork NSW's regulatory role by promoting accountability, procedural fairness, and respectful engagement. It also recognises that complaints are essential to help us identify systemic issues and drive continuous improvement in service delivery, practices, and customer and duty holder experience.

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibilities of People Handling a Complaint:

Commissioner

- Oversee SafeWork NSW's complaint management framework including establishing and promoting the Complaint Management Policy, ensuring accessible information, appointing a complaint manager and ensuring effective, timely handling of significant or systemic issues
- Ensure robust internal and external reporting on complaint management, including compliance with the NSW Ombudsman's Guidelines and required annual reporting

Executive Leadership Team

- Review and action quarterly reports and ensure adequate funding and resourcing to effectively manage complaints and address systemic issues.

- Act as the final escalation point for complaints if required, including approving proposals to restrict customers from complaint services under the Managing Disruptive Behaviours Procedure.

Complaints Manager

- Administer and update the Complaint Management (External) Policy
- Oversee SafeWork NSW's complaint management system, including the monitoring, evaluation and reporting of complaints to identify trends and systemic issues
- Ensure the ongoing effectiveness of complaint handling arrangements by supporting appropriate resourcing, continuous improvement and escalation of unresolved complaints

Managers

- Ensure staff, consultants, contractors and external service providers comply with this framework, and are familiar with SafeWork NSW's Complaint Management (External) Procedure
- Provide reporting on complaint data and related actions or decisions to the Complaints Manager
- Act as the first point of escalation for unresolved complaints and escalate serious, complex, or ongoing matters to the Manager Issues and Complaints Resolution (Complaints Manager)

Staff

- Comply with this policy and associated procedure
- Be aware of their roles, responsibilities and authorities in respect of complaints, including knowing how to recognise complaints, and responding promptly and appropriately
- Treat complainants in a respectful and courteous manner and escalate unresolved complaints to their Manager

Responsibilities of People Who Make a Complaint

- Provide information that is accurate and relevant
- Cooperate responsibly with SafeWork NSW during the complaint handling process
- Treat SafeWork NSW staff with courtesy and respect. We do not tolerate aggressive behaviour towards our staff.
- Understand that some matters may be subject to legislative limitations or may fall outside the scope of the complaints process

Foundational Principles

The policy is guided by the NSW Ombudsman's Guidelines for Effective Complaint Management and aligns with the principles of Australian Standard AS 10002:2022.

SafeWork NSW is committed to understanding barriers that customers may face when making a complaint as well as providing a trauma informed response to complaints or concerns raised. We aim to improve accessibility for customers, simplify the complaints process and be receptive and responsive to complaints by adopting a proactive and person-first approach. The following principles underpin this

policy and outline how SafeWork NSW will manage external complaints received from the public. This is what the public can expect from SafeWork NSW when raising complaints or concerns.

1. Respectful treatment

SafeWork NSW treats all customers with courtesy, respect, and professionalism. We provide responsive service and ensure staff are trained to manage complaints effectively and with sensitivity to diverse needs. We take appropriate action when concerns are raised about staff conduct and ensure people can make complaints without fear of detrimental action.

2. Information and accessibility

SafeWork NSW is committed to making our complaints process easy to find, easy to understand and easy to use. We support customers to lodge complaints and provide clear information in multiple formats and across different channels. We explain how to make a complaint, what information is required, who to contact, what to expect and how complaints help us improve our services.

3. Communication

SafeWork NSW promptly acknowledges complaints, clearly outlines next steps and expected timeframes, and provides a dedicated contact point. We communicate through appropriate channels with regular updates to ensure complainants are informed about the progress of their complaint. SafeWork NSW also explains the outcome and gives reasons for decisions. We offer clear explanations and apologies when things go wrong.

4. Taking ownership

SafeWork NSW takes ownership of complaints by ensuring trained staff manage them. Each matter is assigned to a dedicated contact. Issues are resolved at the frontline where possible. Serious or complex complaints are escalated to the right area. Complainants are also informed whenever their complaint is transferred.

5. Timeliness

SafeWork NSW manages complaints as quickly as possible by setting and publicly communicating timeframes that reflect urgency and complexity, progressing matters efficiently and informing complainants about any unavoidable delays and the reasons for them.

6. Transparency

SafeWork NSW ensures transparency by recording and analysing complaint data including volumes, timeliness, issues raised, actions taken, and systemic trends, and reviews requests to strengthen accountability and drive continuous organisational improvement.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Accessibility	How easy it is for people to use our services, including people from diverse backgrounds and with different needs.
Apology	A statement that acknowledges something went wrong and expresses regret.

Complaint	Any expression of dissatisfaction about SafeWork NSW or our services where the person expects a response. This may relate to: • customer service • our actions or decisions • delays or lack of action • how we follow our policies or processes.
Complainant	Any person or organisation that makes a complaint. A customer becomes a complainant once they raise a complaint with SafeWork NSW.
Complaint Review	A second look at a complaint by someone who was not involved originally, to make sure the matter is assessed fairly.
Customer	Anyone who interacts with or is affected by SafeWork NSW. This includes people who live, work, visit or operate a business in NSW — even if they do not contact us directly.
Disruptive Behaviour	Behaviour from a complainant that poses safety, resource or fairness risks for our staff because of its nature or frequency. These situations are managed under our Managing Disruptive Behaviour Procedure.
Employee	Anyone employed by SafeWork NSW, including permanent, temporary, part-time, fulltime, and casual staff, as well as contractors.
External Review	When a complaint is looked at by an independent organisation, such as the NSW Ombudsman or the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT). An external review may involve mediation, investigation or an appeal process.
Feedback	Comments or opinions about our services that do not require a response.
Resolution	When we have responded to the issues raised in a complaint in line with this policy and our procedures — even if the complainant does not agree with the outcome.
The Standard	AS 10002:2022, the Australian Standard for how organisations should manage complaints
Trauma-informed approach	Recognising that many people have experienced trauma and that this can affect how they communicate, respond to stress and interact with others. We aim to respond with sensitivity and understanding.
Unresolved Complaint	A complaint where the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome. Unresolved complaints may be escalated within SafeWork NSW or to an external body such as the NSW Ombudsman.

Privacy, Record Keeping and Information Handling

We store all complaint records securely and manage them in line with NSW State Records requirements. Only staff who are responsible for handling your complaint can access this information.

We collect, use and share personal information in accordance with the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* (NSW) and the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* (NSW). To assess and investigate a complaint, we may need to share relevant personal information with other individuals or organisations. This occurs only when necessary, and in line with our Privacy Management Plan. Where required, we will seek your permission before sharing your information. You have the right to request access to your personal information and to ask us to correct it if it is inaccurate.

Complaint records are retained and disposed of in accordance with the NSW State Records retention and disposal authorities. For more information about how we handle personal information, please refer to the SafeWork NSW [Privacy Management Plan](#).

Complaints Process

SafeWork NSW has several pathways for handling complaints, depending on their type. Complaints may be complex in nature and involve multiple components, requiring collaboration between different areas of the organisation. The below table outlines the levels and types of complaints and the pathway in which they will be managed.

Level 1 – First point of contact

Most complaints can be sorted out quickly by the team you first speak with. They will listen to your concerns, explain what they can do, and try to fix the issue straight away. If they can't resolve it, they'll record your complaint and let you know the next steps.

Level 2 – Internal review

If your complaint can't be resolved at first contact, or it needs a closer look, it will be reviewed by a Manager or by the Issues and Complaints Resolution Team. They will look at the issue in more detail, gather any extra information needed, and keep you updated while they work toward an outcome.

Level 3 – Independent external review

If you're unhappy with how we've handled your complaint at Levels 1 and 2, you may go to an independent oversight body, such as the NSW Ombudsman to seek advice. External bodies may review unresolved complaints and they may investigate, help with conciliation, or make recommendations.

Type of complaint	Pathway
Non-reviewable decisions	If a person is unhappy with a decision that cannot be formally reviewed under legislation, their concerns are treated as a complaint. These are usually handled by the first point of contact and can be escalated if the issue is not resolved.
Policies or processes	Concerns about SafeWork NSW policies or processes are handled first by the business area that owns the policy. If the person is not satisfied with the initial outcome, the matter may be escalated.
Privacy complaints	Concerns about how personal information has been handled are managed by the SafeWork NSW Privacy Team.
Procurement complaints	Concerns about purchasing processes or supplier engagement are managed by the SafeWork NSW Procurement Team.
Regulatory actions or delays	Complaints about delays or concerns about regulatory actions (or lack of action) are handled at the first point of contact. If needed, the matter may

	be escalated to the Issues and Complaints Resolution Team or the Regulatory Assurance and Reviewable Decisions Team.
Reviewable decisions	Some decisions can be formally reviewed under legislation. These are handled through SafeWork NSW's internal review process and are not treated as complaints unless other concerns are raised.
Service Delivery	Complaints about the quality of our services, delays, or how someone was treated by staff are handled initially by the first point of contact. If unresolved, they may be escalated.

The nature of more complex and multifaceted complaints means there will be times where it is unclear who should handle management of the complaint. In this circumstance, complaints can be referred to the Issues and Complaints Resolution Team who can coordinate all relevant business units.

SafeWork NSW follows a structured complaints process to ensure all matters are treated with fairness, respect and timeliness from receipt to resolution. Employees are expected to manage complaints in line with the SafeWork NSW Complaints Management Procedure.

How We Receive Complaints

You can make a complaint to SafeWork NSW via the following pathways:

- Via Phone by calling 13 15 10
- Online through the online enquiry form on SafeWork NSW website www.safework.nsw.gov.au
- In person or directly with a SafeWork Inspector.
- In writing to Locked Bag 2906 Lisarow NSW 2252

SafeWork NSW has a 'no wrong door' approach receiving complaints. Whichever pathway a complaint is received through, we will ensure it is referred to the correct area for the nature of the complaint.

After a Complaint Is Raised

Acknowledgement

SafeWork NSW will acknowledge your complaint promptly. We will outline what happens next, the expected timeframes and who you can contact. You will receive an acknowledgement within 2 working days.

Assessment

Every complaint is initially assessed to understand the nature and urgency of the complaint, and to determine the most suitable path to resolution. This may include deciding whether immediate action is required or whether the matter should be referred to another team. If your complaint involves potential fraud or corruption, we will follow the appropriate escalation processes, which may affect timeframes. We will let you know if your complaint is referred through these pathways.

Investigation

Where required, we will investigate complaints thoroughly and impartially. This may involve gathering information, reviewing records or consulting with relevant staff or stakeholders. We will keep you updated on the progress of your complaint at least every 20 working days, or sooner if needed.

Resolution

SafeWork NSW will determine the outcome of your complaint and take all necessary steps to resolve the issues raised. We will inform you of the outcome and explain any actions we have taken in response.

Closure and review

Once all actions are completed, your complaint will be formally closed, and we will notify you. We may review how your complaint was handled to ensure our processes are appropriate and to identify opportunities for improvement. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome, you may request an internal review by a person who was not involved in the original handling of your complaint.

Continuous Improvement

Information from complaints helps us identify trends, risks and opportunities to improve our services, regulatory practices and customer experience. These insights support ongoing improvements across SafeWork NSW.

Timeframes

Response timeframes may vary for matters involving other agencies, legal requirements or safety critical issues. If timeframes- need to change, we will let you know as early as possible.

Apologies

SafeWork NSW is committed to delivering genuine and meaningful apologies in circumstances where our actions, decisions, delays or service standards have negatively affected a person.

An apology may include:

- an acknowledgement of what went wrong
- an expression of regret or sorrow
- an explanation of the cause, where known
- advice about what we will do to fix the issue (if possible)
- advice about what we will do to prevent it happening again (where relevant)

We provide apologies in line with the NSW Ombudsman's Guidelines, which emphasise the importance of clear communication, transparency, and accountability when responding to complaints.

The provision of an apology does not limit a person's right to request an internal review or to seek an external review through the NSW Ombudsman or NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Managing Disruptive Behaviour

We do not tolerate harm, abuse or threats towards our staff. If we identify that disruptive behaviour by a complainant is affecting our work and wellbeing, we may implement proportionate strategies to manage this. Strategies can include setting communication limits, nominating a single point of contact, or pausing engagement, consistent with NSW Ombudsman guidance and our Work Health and Safety obligations. These situations will be managed under the SafeWork NSW Managing Disruptive Behaviour Procedure.

Internal and External Review Pathways

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they may request an internal review, which will be conducted by a person not involved in the original decision or handling. If still dissatisfied, external review options include the NSW Ombudsman, and where legislation provides, the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Monitoring, Reporting and Continuous Improvement

We record and analyse complaint data (e.g., volumes, categories, timeliness and outcomes), report trends to leadership and the Audit and Risk Committee, and use insights to drive service and system improvements. Where appropriate, we will publish high-level metrics and improvements to enhance transparency.

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