



SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

Proudly Sponsored by the Safety Institute of Australia (Victoria Division)
National Office: PO Box 2078, GLADSTONE PARK Victoria 3043

Issue 1 May 16 2005 ISSN 1832-6714

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Supplied by SAFETY AT WORK magazine

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Poor Driver Training may have lead to Ambo's Deaths

May 9 2005

Inadequate driver training and the use of old ambulances could have contributed to the deaths of two Victorian paramedics in a crash, a preliminary coronial hearing was told today.

Paramedics Robert Bland, 50, and Phillip Oakley, 33, were rushing to a car accident on a narrow winding section of the Maroondah Highway, near Healesville, when their ambulance careered off a bend and slammed into a tree on January 2 last year.

It was the first time in Victoria that metropolitan ambulance paramedics had died on duty.

Today, the Victorian Coroners Court was told inadequate driver training could have contributed to the smash.

"With my client, questions have been raised ... as to whether or not that training was inadequate," Ambulance Employees' Association (AEA) of Victoria lawyer Ben Redford told coroner Phillip Byrne.

He said his client was also concerned about the use and maintenance of the older-style GMC ambulances.

"It (the AEA) has been vocal on the use of that vehicle and the methods used for the

maintenance for that vehicle and faults associated with it," he said.

"It is my client's position that there are problems about the processes with collection and storage of data in relation to these vehicles."

Mr Bland's brother-in-law, Reg Schlipalius, said his family wanted the inquest to focus on the braking and steering capabilities of the ambulance.

"I guess our focus would be the mechanical condition of the vehicle," he said.

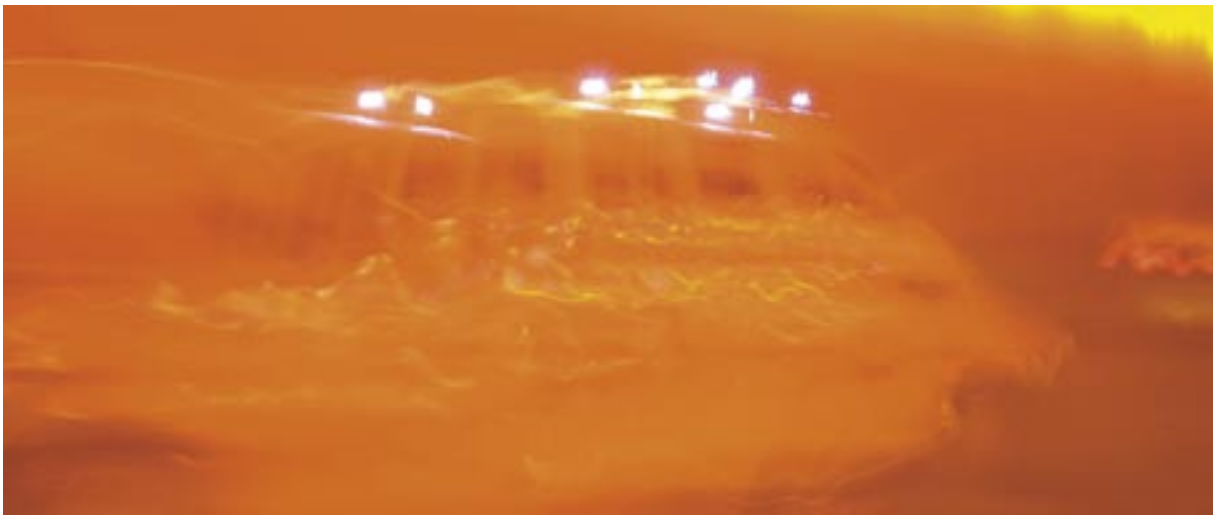
Mr Redford said he planned to call an engineer with experience in workplace accidents to give evidence at the inquest, while legal counsel for VicRoads, Belinda Marinucci, said she would call an expert witness to reconstruct what happened in the crash.

Mr Byrne said the aim of the inquest was not to attribute blame but to establish the cause of the accident.

He said the main issues the inquest would cover included the circumstances of the accident, the condition of the road, the allocation of codes for emergency driving, the use of the older-style GMC ambulance and driver training.

Mr Byrne ordered a four-day inquest at a date to be set.

AAP



Business welcomes changes to Workplace Safety Bill

5 May 2005

State Chamber of Commerce (NSW) CEO Margy Osmond today welcomed changes to proposed workplace fatality laws saying they would protect responsible employers from falling foul of the law.

Mrs Osmond said the changes, which came after several months of consultation between the State Government and business groups like the Chamber, would ensure that in the tragic case of a fatality in the workplace only rogue employers were prosecuted.

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SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

SIA News

It will be obvious to you that we have changed the look and format of the **SIA Safety At Work Bulletin**. This has occurred for several reasons.

Although the Bulletin has been produced specifically for SIA members, some members have been forwarding the file onto non-SIA members. This has required us to review the content.

The format has been changed because this is no longer a commercial news bulletin that has been rebadged and "tweaked" to meet the SIA information needs. It is a news bulletin in its own technical right. This has generated its own ISSN number and required us to renumber the bulletin starting with this issue as number 1.

We have also incorporated SIA member suggestions by reformatting so that the bulletin can be read on a PC monitor and still be printed.

The commercial bulletin, **Safety At Work Bulletin**, has exclusive and additional content for its subscribers.

A few members had difficulty opening the PDF file. From this issue the file will be configured to run with any version of Acrobat Reader from version 4 onwards. Sadly this also reduces some of the functionality, principally, the removal of active hyperlinks.

Lastly, some members have asked to circulate the bulletin on their own intranet. This is not allowed as the bulletin is only for SIA members. However, the SIA does have a corporate membership which would allow you to circulate the bulletin. More information on this is available from the SIA Secretariat.

Otherwise, **Safety At Work Bulletin** does have a corporate subscription rate to its magazine.

Please remember that if you have news about a Safety Institute function in your State, or comments about the Bulletin, please email the Editor, Safety At Work Bulletin c/o natadmin@sia.org.au

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"These are sensible and well-thought out changes that provide certainty for responsible employers but at the same time ensure employers that 'deliberately and recklessly' put their employee's lives at risk face harsh penalties," she said.

"A recent survey of our membership showed that businesses across NSW supported the jailing of employers who place their staff's lives at risk.

"But it also confirmed that businesses overwhelmingly believed in their right to have their individual safety training and general safety practices considered as part of their defence if they were prosecuted under the proposed laws.

"The new provisions in the Bill have provided that right and also more some protection for directors or managers.

"We are very pleased that the NSW Government recognised the flaws in its original draft bill and worked closely with business to arrive at a more workable compromise," Mrs Osmond said.

Source: State Chamber of Commerce (NSW)

Scenic chairlift operators charged

May 10 2005

Victoria's work safety authority WorkSafe has charged the operators of a Victorian chairlift over an incident last year that left a 77-year-old woman with broken legs.

Tri Thi Le's chair on the popular Arthurs Seat attraction on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula came loose and slid into the chair in front on March 18, 2004.

The Preston woman's legs were crushed and she needed pins inserted in them.

It was the second accident for the troubled chairlift in just over a year, after part of it collapsed in January 2003.

Eighteen people were injured and 65 people were trapped in their seats in that incident.

WorkSafe had lifted a prohibition notice in October to allow the ride to reopen when its operators showed it had the capacity to operate safely.

The move followed upgrades including collision barriers between chairs, chair height above the road increased and improvement in wind and weather monitoring.

But yesterday, WorkSafe charged Arthurs Seat Scenic Chairlift Pty Ltd over the incident for an alleged breach of the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

The charge alleges a breach of section 22 of the act, which says that employers must

not expose persons other than employees to risks arising from the employer's conduct or undertaking.

The company could be fined up to \$250,000 under the act. Worksafe said they would not make any further comment about the case as it was before the courts. AAP

Warning after man killed in loading accident

May 11 2005

Victoria's transport industry has been urged to review its safety standards after a man was crushed to death by a falling shipping container.

Worksafe Victoria has launched an investigation into Saturday's accident at Carisbrook, in central Victoria, but the government body also called today for an industry-wide review of safety practices.

The 42-year-old Maryborough man who died in the accident was the fourth person killed in Victoria this year while either loading or unloading vehicles.

Worksafe's transport and storage division director Ross Pilkington said the man's death had again highlighted the critical need for protocols to ensure workers stayed out of harm's way, particularly in workplaces that used heavy machinery.

"Worksafe has been working with the transport industry for three years to increase understanding of the risks associated with pedestrians during the loading or unloading of vehicles," Mr Pilkington said today.

"In the light of the weekend's tragedy, now is the time for everyone involved with the transport industry to take stock of their situation."

Mr Pilkington said Worksafe Victoria often heard of safety improvements in workplaces after accidents took place.

"By then it's too late," he said.

The website www.worksafe.vic.gov.au carries a range of information designed to boost safety standards in the transport sector. AAP

One in six trucks found defective in road safety operation

12 May 2005

One in six trucks checked by Victorian police as part of a national road safety operation this month have been found to be defective.

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Continued from page 2

Victorian traffic police have targeted truck drivers in the national operation, which focused on fatigue in the transport industry.

Acting Inspector Jeff Millar, of the Road Safety Task Force, says of 672 trucks checked by Victorian police this month, 112 were issued with defect notices.

He says 87 drivers were nabbed for log book offences and a further 21 for exceeding permitted driving hours.

An interstate truck driver intercepted at Benalla, 200 km north-east of Melbourne, was found in possession of two grams of methamphetamine.

Twenty-four trucks were found to be overloaded, while one driver was booked for failing to properly restrain his load.

Insp Millar said police would intensify the operation as May drew to a close and warned drivers and employers to ensure driving hours were not excessive.

"We encourage all truck drivers to make sure they have had sufficient rest so that they are safe and comply with their driving hour requirements," he said.

"Employers and consignors need to also make sure they are not contributing to a driver's fatigue."

AAP

Rail union calls for minister to solve drug test dispute

May 12 2005

NSW Transport Minister John Watkins will hold crisis talks today with angry rail workers concerned about random drug test protocols.

A snap strike by 300 workers threw Sydney train services into chaos late yesterday, creating delays and cancelled services throughout the network.

The industrial action, which is still causing delays although workers are now back at work, was called after maintenance workers refused to submit to random drug tests at the Flemington Maintenance Centre.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), which represents most rail maintenance workers, today said it had never

rejected drug and alcohol testing.

But the government had promised to deliver a protocol for drug testing and had failed to do so, AMWU Transport coordinator Mark Hoban said.

The walk-out could have been avoided if the government's negotiator had agreed to attend a meeting to discuss drug testing protocols, which the union had requested yesterday morning, he said.

Instead, the union claims the negotiator threatened legal action against union members if they refused the tests.

Mr Hoban called on Mr Watkins to take responsibility for the dispute.

"He must step in because his department has shown that it is not capable of solving this dispute," Mr Hoban said.

A spokeswoman for Mr Watkins said the minister would meet with the union this afternoon.

AAP

New OHS Act information sheets now available

11 May 2005

WorkSafe has released a series of 10 information sheets on how the new Occupational Health and Safety Act affects Victorian workplaces.

WorkSafe's Executive Director, John Merritt said the information sheets were part of the health and safety regulator's commitment to providing guidance to employers and employees before the Act takes effect on July 1.

The information sheets are available now on WorkSafe's website, www.worksafe.vic.gov.au. Printed copies will be available from WorkSafe's suburban and regional offices next week.

The information sheet topics include:

- Information for employers
- Information for employees
- Information on engaging contractors
- Duties of contractors
- Information for occupiers and those who manage or control workplaces

Continued on page 4

NSW Offers Police Full Death and Disability Cover

May 9 2005

By Samantha Baden, Industrial Reporter - AAP

All NSW police will be covered by comprehensive death and disability insurance after the state government announced it had reached an agreement with the police union.

But the scheme will not come into effect until the NSW government delivers its long-awaited police pay offer and both schemes are endorsed by the union's membership.

The plan was welcomed by the NSW Police Association, which said it had some concerns about the scheme's level of retrospectivity.

The new cover would deliver equity to those who joined the force after 1998, which meant about 70 per cent of police, NSW Police Minister Carl Scully said today.

Those officers are currently not entitled to any special cover over and above standard public service workers' compensation. Those who joined the police prior to 1998 are already entitled to generous death and disability cover.

The proposed scheme will provide a lump sum payment to officers who are discharged from service for work-related injuries, and will pay benefits based on the injured officer's age and degree of incapacity. If an officer is killed on duty, the scheme will pay benefits to a spouse or to the officer's estate.

"What I've told the Police Association is that it will commence when the police members vote in favour of the pay offer and the death and disability scheme I've put on the table today," Mr Scully said. "While the pay offer will not be discounted to fund the death and disability scheme, both the scheme and the pay rise obviously reflect the award that police officers will work under, so the government's made a decision that it will commence when police officers approve both."

The NSW Police Association has threatened to take industrial action if it does not receive a "substantial" pay offer by May 20.

Mr Scully today declined to provide details, but said a pay offer would be made by the association's deadline. All serving police officers at the time the death and disability scheme is introduced will be able to apply for benefits, Mr Scully said. But those already medically discharged will not be covered.

"It will apply to police officers on duty now for those medically discharged after the scheme commences," he said. "Obviously police officers have been medically discharged in the past (and) they will not be part of the scheme."

Police association president Bob Pritchard said the proposed death and disability cover recognised the danger police faced every day. "It's a great achievement for the union, the members and government," Mr Pritchard said. "It shows the government has recognised the good work police are doing out there and know that it's a very dangerous profession. We just hope that plays onto our wage round."

The union had some concerns about the scheme's level of retrospectivity, Mr Pritchard said. "But in the main we're quite happy about the scheme," he said.



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- Information for senior officers of organisations
- Information about 'Right of Entry'
- Information for installers, erectors and commissioners of plant
- Information for manufacturers and suppliers of plant
- Information for manufacturers and suppliers of substances

Source: WorkSafe Victoria

Free assistance in safety management for WA's small businesses

May 9 2005

The Gallop Government's program developed by WorkSafe, to assist Western Australia's small businesses with safety management, has proved to be a big hit.

Consumer and Employment Protection Minister John Kobelke said the ThinkSafe Small Business Assistance Program had attracted significant interest because it was not only free, but well targeted to small businesses which felt they needed help.

"Small business employs almost half of WA's workforce, and research indicates many small businesses are uncertain about how to get started on creating a safe and healthy workplace for their employees," Mr Kobelke said.

"This ThinkSafe program is focused squarely on education - not enforcement - and the consultant's visit is confidential with no aspect of the company's actual safety performance reported back to WorkSafe.

"A lot of WA's small businesses operate in industries with high rates of death, injury and disease, so the new program is a positive step in helping reduce workplace risks."

The Minister said when a company registered for the program, WorkSafe arranged for an independent occupational safety and health consultant to conduct an assessment of the workplace and prepare a simple safety action plan.

"It is primarily directed at those high-risk industry sectors that have significant rates of injury and disease - like agriculture, forestry and fishing, construction, health and community services, manufacturing, storage, wholesale, transport and retail," Mr Kobelke said.

"Since the program began, applications have been received from all over the State - from Esperance to Kununurra.

"I encourage small business employers with fewer than 20 employees to take

advantage of this terrific opportunity to improve safety and health management, because of the benefits a safe workplace provides - both in human and financial terms.

"The Gallop Government is committed to creating safer communities and ensuring workplaces are safer and healthier is a key part of the strategy."

To apply for assistance, under the ThinkSafe Small Business Assistance Program, eligible businesses should seek an application form through WorkSafe's Hazard Hotline on 1800 429 273 or download it from the website at <http://www.safetyline.wa.gov.au>

Source: WA Government

Q'ld Death Prompts Reminder On Children In Workplaces

May 13, 2005

A \$40,000 fine imposed on a Queensland dairy farm over the death of a child in 2003 has prompted WorkSafe to issue a reminder on taking children into hazardous workplaces.

WorkSafe WA Commissioner Nina Lyhne said today that several recent incidents in the Eastern States involving children in workplaces should be sounding alarm bells in this State.

"In the recent court case in Queensland, a dairy farm was fined \$40,000 over an incident in which a 2-year-old boy drowned in cattle dip," Ms Lyhne said.

"The child's father worked on the farm, and his mother was assisting him when the child wandered away on his own and fell into an unguarded tub of cattle dip.

"Late last year, a 14-year-old Victorian boy was seriously injured when nearly two tonnes of glass fell on him at a factory.

"That incident followed closely on the death of a 12-year-old in a forklift incident at a Melbourne factory.

"Four young Western Australians have died in workplace incidents and on worksites over the past seven years, and a young boy died in 2002 when an all-terrain vehicle overturned on a farm in the South-West of WA.

"Although this incident took place during recreational activity, a farm is a workplace and plant and machinery can be hazardous to young people.

"Parents need to give careful thought to where they allow their children to go because workplaces such as farms, factories and construction sites can present a number of potential hazards to children of which adults may not even be aware," she said.

Continued on page 5

NZ Navy Blames Faulty Mechanism for Lifeboat Injuries

May 10 2005

A release mechanism on a New Zealand Navy lifeboat had been faulty since it entered service but was not discovered until a lifeboat plunged into Sydney Harbour last year, a court of inquiry has found.

The lifeboat on the supply ship HMNZS Endeavour landed upside-down in the water on August 16, injuring 16 of the 22 crew members on board.

Some had to be rescued semi-conscious from the water by other Endeavour crew members and Australian Navy sailors.

A court of inquiry released its report today, which said no single cause could be blamed for the accident.

It said the faulty mechanism, incorrect launching drills by the lifeboat crew, and the lack of a properly fitted safety indication guard, all contributed to the accident.

It said the faulty release mechanism failed to properly lock when the lifeboat was lifted from the water. It was either a design fault or a manufacturing error, and would have been on both Endeavour's lifeboats since they entered service.

The navy's maritime component commander, Commodore Jack Steer, who assembled the Court of Inquiry, said all 16 of the court of inquiry's recommendations would be implemented and no one would be disciplined.

The navy said as a result of the findings it was also repositioning safety and operating signs, and developing or buying new training equipment, and improving procedures for using lifeboats, including training, maintenance and operations. It would review policy and training for all navy ship lifesaving gear.

The court said crew members who dived into the water to rescue injured sailors exemplified the navy's core values of commitment, courage and comradeship. It also noted the valuable support provided by the Royal Australian Navy.

Source: NZPA

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"I'm not suggesting that parents are careless – they may simply not recognise the hazards that specifically apply to children in workplaces.

"Employers should also be reminded that they need to have safe systems of work in place to minimise the risk of injury to anyone in their workplace.

"Young people can often end up in workplaces with a parent during school holidays, but the warning applies equally to young people on work experience or on a farm holiday.

"What we must keep in mind is that most children do not have the maturity or experience to understand hazards and their potential consequences, and this can prove to be serious or even fatal.

"Hence, I urge parents to think twice about taking young people into potentially hazardous workplaces, and to carefully consider giving them permission to accompany another adult to a workplace – it could well avoid a tragic incident like the recent ones in the Eastern States."

A code of practice on the safety and health of children and young people in workplaces is available from on WorkSafe's website at www.safetyline.wa.gov.au.

Source: WorkSafe WA

Radiator manufacturer convicted for safety breach

9 May 2005A radiator manufacturer and supplier has been fined \$5000 in the Industrial Relations Court after pleading guilty to a charge of failing to ensure the safety of one of its employees.

An employee for Adrad Pty Ltd sustained an amputation injury to his fingertip on 31 March 2003 when operating a guillotine used to make aluminium radiator fins.

In handing down the decision, Industrial Magistrate Hardy said the defendant failed to conduct a risk assessment on the fin machine to identify the hazards and eliminate the risks.

"All that was done, was by way of visual inspection and apparent observation of the existence of a guard without reference to its effectiveness", said Magistrate Hardy.

"The machine appeared to be guarded and a procedure was in place that would if implemented, have prevented this accident.

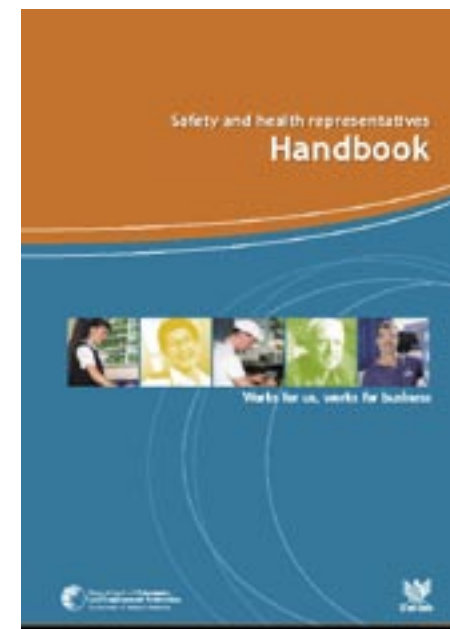
"The prosecution maintains, quite correctly, that despite these factors, the machine could have been rendered safe for a tired, hurried and inadvertent worker."

Source: Department of Administrative and Information Services

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New WA OHS Rep Handbook

The handbook is available for download at <http://www.safetyline.wa.gov.au/pagebin/guidswa0010.pdf>





SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

Rail Workers Strike over Random Drug Testing

By Nicole Azzopardi and David Crawshaw

May 11 2005

A snap strike by 300 rail workers threw Sydney train services into chaos late today, creating delays and cancelled services throughout the network - with more of the same expected tomorrow. The industrial action, which is expected to disrupt services for the next 24 hours, was called after maintenance workers refused to submit to random drug tests at Flemington Maintenance Centre today.

Members of the Australian Metal Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union will not go back to work until 6am (AEST) tomorrow. The strike has affected CityRail's train maintenance facilities at Flemington, Hornsby and Mortdale. But RailCorp tonight warned the strike would affect train services during the morning peak, particularly on the Illawarra line.

"We will also need to alter our train crew rosters for tomorrow morning because we will not be able to stable some trains in their normal locations this evening," a spokeswoman said. "This will affect some services tomorrow morning."

Some services were delayed by 20 minutes, while others had to be cancelled late today because of the stoppage.

Unions NSW deputy assistant secretary Matt Thistlewaite said union members were not opposed to drug and alcohol testing but wanted RailCorp to negotiate an official policy. "This is an ongoing dispute between RailCorp and the unions relating to the procedure under which they undertake the random tests," Mr Thistlewaite said. "The Rail Safety Act has gazetted guidelines which state that prior to conducting any random testing, RailCorp and the unions should negotiate a procedure under which the random tests are to take place."

RailCorp was refusing to negotiate a policy to deal with the drug testing and was "simply relying on Australian standards", he said. RailCorp also had not outlined disciplinary action it could take against staff who tested positive to drugs, Mr Thistlewaite said.

RailCorp spokeswoman Helen Willoughby said the crux of the dispute was that the unions wanted drug testing to assess impairment rather than the actual content of drugs or alcohol. The Rail Safety Act required RailCorp to test for drug content using Australian standards, she said. She acknowledged RailCorp did not have an official policy on drug testing and instead relied on the national standard to enforce the requirements of the act. But a new enterprise bargaining agreement, expected to be certified next month, specified that workers could be dismissed for serious or repeat drug offences, Ms Willoughby said.

Some union members were fundamentally opposed to drug testing in any form, she said. Mr Thistlewaite said union members had told RailCorp of the dispute six weeks ago. The unions were seeking a meeting with RailCorp and Transport Minister John Watkins to discuss the matter.

AAP

Continued from page 5

Workplace Eye Injuries Too High Say Optometrists

28 April 2005

Optometrists are urging employers and tradespeople to make eye safety a priority, after recent figures show that 116,000[1] Australians each year seek medical assistance for eye injuries.

More emphasis on correct eye safety procedures and equipment is needed to prevent eye injuries in the workplace, according to Ian Bluntish, President of Optometrists Association Australia.

Over half the patients with occupational related eye injuries were aged between 20 – 34 years and more than 90 per cent were male. High-risk occupations include boilermakers, metal fitters, mechanics, structural steel and welding tradespeople and trade assistants.

Many workplace eye injuries happen as a result of workers walking by or assisting others performing tasks without the proper eye protection.

"Workers who wear standard spectacles as protection are often lulled into a false sense of security because they believe that their standard spectacles will provide sufficient eye protection," says Mr Bluntish.

"Contact lenses with appropriate protective eyewear will keep out flying debris and will also provide a better field of vision for the wearer, where blind spots created by spectacle frames are eliminated," he says.

Eye injuries cost Australia over \$155 million a year, with welding and grinding activities responsible for the most eye injuries sustained at work.

"Employers have a legal requirement to provide a safe working environment outlined in the Australia standards recommended practices for eye protection.

It is vital, however, that management work with employees to establish these practices if they are to be successful," says Mr Bluntish.

Optometrists Association Australia recommends the three-step

approach as outlined in the Australian Standard 1336-1997 to reduce eye injuries in the workplace.

Employers and employees need to work together to:

1. Eliminate possible eye hazards
2. Control potential hazards
3. Wear correct eye protection

To download an important fact sheet about correct eye safety procedures log on to www.optometrists.asn.au

Source: Optometrists Association Australia

Workplace Eye Safety Fact Sheet

Recent figures show that 116,000 Australians a year seek medical assistance for eye injuries. Eye injuries cost Australia over \$155 million a year, with welding and grinding activities responsible for the most workplace eye injuries. A large number of these injuries are the result of workers without the proper protection eyewear being too close to the activity or assisting others to perform potentially dangerous tasks.

All employers have a legal requirement to provide a safe working environment. This is particularly important in industrial and manufacturing activities.

Optometrists Association Australia recommends the three-step approach as outlined in the Australian Standard (Australian Standard 1336-1997) to specifically reduce eye injuries in the workplace.

Employers and employees need to work together to:

1. Eliminate possible eye hazards
2. Control potential hazards
3. Wear correct eye protection

Strategies to control or reduce eye injury hazards in your workplace:

- Isolate hazardous operations
- Erect fences or suitable screens or guards to shield from flying fragments, particles or radiation
- Provide water sprays for dampening down dusts
- Reduce dust being raised by air turbulence with windbreaks
- Use catchments, splash guards and barriers to contain dangerous liquids
- Extract dust, gases or fumes with enclosed hoods or booms

General workplace eye safety tips:

- Make sure the type of eye protection selected is appropriate for the task.
- Double safety eyes and restrict or work areas where eye protection is needed.
- Review workplace eye safety procedures regularly to ensure they remain up to date and appropriate for workplace activity
- Normal spectacles in place of proper eye protection form a hazard in the workplace
- For spectacle wearers contact lenses and proper eye protection provide a safer alternative
 - Contact lenses should be discarded if cracked in the field of view by spectacles
 - The elimination of blind spots and good peripheral vision helps to spot equipment in the vicinity
 - Contact lenses allow protective eyewear to fit more comfortably which encourages their use

A general guide to eye protection in the workplace*

Task	Recommended protection
General purposes, low-velocity eye protection Chipping, grinding, sanding, hammering, handling wire and back cutting	• Safety glasses • Safety glasses with side shields • Safety goggles
High-velocity impact eye protection Explosion resistant, high velocity impact	• Full face shields • Full face shields • Full face shields • Full face shields
High-velocity impact eye protection Explosion resistant, high velocity impact	• Full face shields
High-velocity impact eye protection Explosion resistant, high velocity impact	• Full face shields
High-velocity impact eye protection Explosion resistant, high velocity impact	• Full face shields

*This table is for general information only. Refer to Australian Standards (Australian Standard 1336-1997) for more information. All equipment and safety accessories should be used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Always use appropriate eye protection when working with machinery, equipment and tools. Always use appropriate eye protection when working with machinery, equipment and tools.

Workers walk off job at refinery after caustic burns

12 May 2005

Safety fears have prompted 600 workers at Alcoa's Pinjarra refinery in Western Australia to walk off the job, after union claims 18 workers have been injured by caustic burns.

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SIA Safety At Work Bulletin
Issue 2, May 16, 2005 ISSN 1832-6714

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This weekly news bulletin is produced on behalf of the Safety Institute of Australia (Victoria Division) by Workplace Safety Services P/L.

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Maintenance and construction contractors at the plant say they won't return to work until tomorrow morning, after two incidents in the past week where a faulty machine has been blamed for hurting employees.

Mark Golesworthy, organiser for the West Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, says Alcoa has agreed to pull apart the suspect machines.

An independent audit yesterday found that the controls in place before a series of spills at the refinery, 90 km south of Perth, were inadequate. AAP

Texting bus driver stood down, referred to police

May 15 2005

A Sydney bus driver allegedly photographed sending text messages while driving a school bus has been stood down and the matter referred to police, NSW Transport Minister John Watkins said today.

The driver was photographed by two schoolgirls allegedly text messaging on his mobile phone while driving a school bus from Presbyterian Ladies College at Croydon on Friday.

Mr Watkins said State Transit investigators would speak to the driver and view close circuit television footage before deciding whether he should be sacked.

"The bloke puts his livelihood and job at risk by what he did on Friday, that's why I want this investigation concluded quickly," Mr Watkins told reporters.

Mr Watkins promised to apologise to the students and their families for the incident.

He said bus drivers had been repeatedly warned that using mobile telephones while driving was illegal.

"It's abundantly clear to our State Transit bus drivers that use of a mobile telephone is in breach of the law and it goes against every safety consideration in State Transit," he said. "Every bus driver knows this."

NSW opposition transport spokesman Peter Debnam said Premier Bob Carr and Transport Minister John Watkins should have sacked the driver yesterday instead of allowing investigations into the incident to continue.

"They had all the time in the world yesterday to get the camera footage, to have talked to the driver and sacked him," Mr Debnam told reporters. "What they're doing is sending out a half-hearted response that the driver's suspended (and they) will review it. What we need from this minister and the premier when it comes to public transport safety is

decisive action."

AAP