



SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

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Debate on Importance of OHS Begins (Again)

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Over 310,000 young workers injured on job in past 10 years

SYDNEY, April 24 2006

More than 310,000 Australians aged under 25 have suffered work-related injuries or diseases over the past 10 years, while another 500 were killed. That's about 600 hurt or sick, and one death, each week for 10 years.

The Sydney Morning Herald arrived at the figures using the national workers' compensation database. Yet the true death toll is probably two or three times the figure recorded, it has been claimed.

ACTU assistant secretary Richard Marles says the national compensation figures are a fraction of the entire problem, and even the recently dismantled National Occupational Health and Safety Commission, which compiled the database, has reported its figures are a gross underestimate, the newspaper reports.

The first years at work have led many to death or permanent disability. NSW WorkCover figures show that of 45,689 NSW workers aged 15 to 24 who were injured over the six years to 2004, one in six were permanently disabled.

"It is one of the great untold stories in our country," said ACTU's Mr Marles. "It is not Australia's dirty little secret. It's Australia's dirty giant secret."

The newspaper has also found young Australians to be vulnerable in the job jungle, often signing outrageous conditions, for little pay, or being used as cheap labour under the guise of traineeships.

Young workers are twice as likely to be injured in their first year at work compare with older workers, according to an analysis by Workplace Standards Tasmania. AAP

A Balanced OHS Debate is Needed

Statement by Mr Peter Hendy, Chief Executive

24 April 2006

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), Australia's largest and most representative business and employer organisation, has hit back at claims that Australian employers are neglecting their occupational health and safety responsibilities to young employees.

An article in today's Sydney Morning Herald wrongly suggests that employers are recklessly exposing part time and casual young workers to an increasing risk of injury and death. The headline, 'Young Sacrificed At Work' is a grossly unfair slight on Australian employers, who value their staff and in almost all cases do everything reasonably possible to reduce or eliminate death or injury.

It is right to draw public attention to the need for safer workplaces. More can be done, and should be done. It is wrong, however to give a false impression of Australia's OHS performance, or how it can improve.

Over the past ten years Australian workplaces have become safer. The official data concludes that "Australia's performance continues to show improvements" (CPM, 7th ed, November 2005). The 2005/06 annual report of the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (now ASCC) states that "the increased level of collaboration and consultation between all stakeholders has further

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contributed to making Australian workplaces safer”.

Australia is in the top performing group of nations on OHS performance. We employ more people than ever, yet the number of workplace deaths has fallen by 89% (from 358 in 1998/99 to 189 in 2003/04) and the number of compensated workplace injuries has fallen by 14% (from 159,960 in 1998/99 to 137,520 in 2003/04) (CPM, 7th report).

These reductions in workplace death and injury in Australia have occurred over the same period that all forms of employment, including casual and part time employment, have increased in our labour market. The official CPM report rebuts the SMH claim about ‘the vulnerability of young Australians in the job jungle’. The report concludes the opposite – that the older we are the more we are at risk, with young people having an incidence rate of injury three times lower than persons aged 55 and over.

This data does not suggest that Australian employers and employees are doing enough. But it does inject much needed balance into the debate.

With a combination of improved workplace cultures and better quality laws we can do more. There is a powerful business case for good OHS practices. OHS is a joint responsibility – not just of employers, but also employees, manufacturers and plant or system designers. The New South Wales government can also improve the poor quality of some of its OHS laws, and adopt the better legal structure recently implemented in Victoria.

ACCI

Histoplasmosis Safety Alert

April 10 2006

The NSW Department of Primary Industries has issued a safety alert on Histoplasmosis. Histoplasmosis is caused by a fungus that can create an infection that usually affects the lungs. The DPI advises that disseminated histoplasmosis can be fatal.

The Safety Alert says that “the fungal spore is present in soil, particularly soil with a high content of bat or bird droppings. If the soil containing the fungus is disturbed, the fungus spores become airborne and can be inhaled.”

The hazard is most dangerous for those mining explorers in previously undisturbed underground caverns.

The alert is available for download at http://www.minerals.nsw.gov.au/_data/page/6059/SB06-03_Histoplasmosis.pdf

Man critical after electric shock

MELBOURNE, April 18 2006

A man is in a critical condition after receiving an electric shock while changing light bulbs at a car dealership in Melbourne’s north.

The man, aged in his 30s, was injured shortly before 1pm (AEST) at the car yard on Sydney Road, Coburg North.

WorkSafe spokesman Michael Birt said the man had been on a cherry-picker and was changing light bulbs when the incident occurred. He said the man died but was brought back to life by paramedics who treated him at the scene for some time.

The man was taken to Royal Melbourne Hospital. A hospital spokesman said the man remained in a critical condition late today.

[WorkSafe advised that the man died on Saturday April 22. Ed]

AAP

Man dies after grain truck touches powerlines

MELBOURNE, April 19 2006

A man died when his grain truck touched overhead powerlines on a farm in western Victoria today.

The fatality happened at Nhill about 3pm (AEST) when the man’s truck apparently came into contact with the 22,000 volt overhead powerline, Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) said.

“This is a very tragic incident for the man concerned, his family and friends,” ESV spokesman Ken Gardner said.

The man’s death was the second this year involving farm machinery or equipment touching overhead powerlines.

The driver of a tip truck died on a farm at Bena, in South Gippsland, in January when the raised tandem trailer of the truck he was driving touched overhead powerlines.

ESV said there had been four deaths and several incidents in recent years caused by machinery and equipment touching overhead powerlines on rural properties.

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"Today's tragic death is still being investigated, and while it is too early to draw any conclusions, Energy Safe Victoria urges operators to be extremely careful and understand the dangers involved in working near powerlines," Mr Gardner said. ESV, police and WorkSafe Victoria are all investigating the man's death. AAP

Garbage collector attacked

MELBOURNE, April 20 2006

Police have yet to establish a motive for the brutal bashing of a garbage collector in Melbourne's city centre.

Police said the 35-year-old victim left his garbage truck to collect large industrial bins from a laneway off Flinders Lane about 11.45pm (AEST) yesterday.

"He was at the rear of the Rendezvous Hotel when he was set upon by two men," said police spokeswoman Marika Fengler said. "The victim was struck repeatedly by the offenders who king hit him and struck him in the face as well as assaulting him with a weapon similar to a baseball bat." His attackers made no demands and fled on foot, she said.

The victim, who works for a private company, suffered serious head, leg and arm injuries and was admitted to hospital. Police are checking video surveillance footage in the area. AAP

Report into latest Sydney ferry crash released

SYDNEY, April 20 2006

Equipment problems and a failure to follow emergency procedures were behind the second crash in four months of the Sydney ferry Collaroy, a report has found.

No one was injured when the Collaroy crashed into a wharf a Circular Quay on September 19, 2005 - it had previously crashed there on March 4.

A report by the Office of Transport Safety Investigation (OTSI) tabled in state parliament has revealed that one of the Collaroy's crew tested positive to cannabis after the latest accident. The report said Sydney Ferries failed to drug and alcohol test members of the Collaroy's crew within the required timeframe. The accident occurred when a propulsion control system malfunctioned and the master attempted to stop the ferry by dropping the anchor.

The report found the master failed to hand over control to the engineer, who could have stopped the ferry. The master also sounded the Collaroy's whistle instead of activating an automatic communications system to warn passengers of the danger, the report said. OTSI called for an overhaul of staff training procedures.

NSW Transport Minister John Watkins today said a major safety and training overhaul was already under way at Sydney Ferries as a result of several accidents over the past two years.

"Significant work has already been completed, with changes to the Collaroy, GPS tracking for all boats and tenders being let for new engines and data recorders," Mr Watkins said in a statement. AAP

Workplace bullying seminar at Swan Hill

20 April 2006

WorkSafe's campaign to stamp out workplace bullying returns to the north-west after a session was cancelled in February because of low registrations

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SIA EVENTS

The Visions Conference 2006

Venue:
Rydges International Resort, Yeppoon

August 30, 31 - September 1 2006

www.sia.org.au

The Safety Conference, Sydney NSW

17 - 19 October 2006

www.thesafetyshow.com.

Safety in Action 2006

Venue: Melbourne Exhibition Centre,
2 Clarendon Street Southbank

16-18 May 2006

<http://www.safetyinaction.net.au>

OTHER EVENTS

Waves of Change

Australian Institute of Occupational
Hygienists, Inc.

Venue: Surfers Paradise Marriott Resort,
Gold Coast QLD

2-6 December 2006

For more information email mailto:

conference@aioh.org.au



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The workshop will be held at the Swan Hill Performing Arts Centre from 10.30 pm to 1pm on 22 May.

Bookings are essential for the workshops which can be made online at bullying_info@workcover.vic.gov.au.

Source:WorkSafe

Second workplace death in two days

20 April 2006

A man has died in hospital a week after being crushed by a machine at Carlton and United Beverages' Abbotsford plant.

WorkSafe is investigating the incident which happened on 13 April.

The 58-year-old man from Wantirna was working with a machine which transferred empty bottles from pallets before they were filled. He was found by co-workers caught between a door on the machine and a handrail.

Source:WorkSafe

Influenza as a Workplace Hazard

April 24 2006

According to a new Guide for OHS Professionals, the Australian Influenza Specialist Group recommends that now is a good time to consider vaccinating against the latest influenza strains.

"Vaccinating healthy working adults against influenza will generate cost savings 95% of the time. The exact economic outcomes may vary from year to year, depending on factors such as the illness rate in each season, the absenteeism that results, and the hourly rate of pay of employees who are affected.

"It has also been demonstrated that vaccination has benefits beyond protecting employees against influenza. A study in healthy employees aged between 18 and 64 found those who were vaccinated against influenza had:

- 25% fewer episodes of upper respiratory tract illness
- 43% fewer days off work because of upper respiratory illness
- 44% fewer visits to doctors because of upper respiratory illness."

A copy of the Guide is available for download at http://www.influenzacentre.org/reports/ohs_06.pdf

Start Planning Now To Prevent Sun Cancer At Work

April 17, 2006

Alarming new statistics show that older Victorian workers who have been exposed to the sun at work have a high chance of needing medical attention to prevent skin cancer from developing.

Minister for Workcover, John Lenders, said that over the past two years, 26 per cent of construction workers who volunteered for free WorkSafe funded medical checks were found to have sun damage requiring referral for further medical attention.

"Although summer is now over the threat of skin cancer shouldn't be forgotten and all outdoor workers should consider getting a skin check from their doctor," Mr Lenders said. "It takes less than fifteen minutes to have a check by a doctor but it can save your life."

Mr Lenders said that employers and employees were becoming more aware of the dangers of skin cancer but more needs to be done.

"WorkSafe now expects all employers of outdoor workers to have sun protection measures in place during the months when UV radiation is at a harmful level," Mr Lenders said. "A broad rimmed hat, SPF 30+ sunscreen and approved sunglasses are among the most important items of safety equipment for construction workers.

"Unfortunately for older workers the damage is often already done from their younger working days but by getting medical attention the spread of any cancerous growths can be stopped.

"Employers can also help to protect workers against the dangers of damage caused by the sun. Employers and employees who perform outside work should start planning for next summer rather than leaving it until spring when often it is too late to change the way work is done."

At two recent 'skin check days' on construction sites in metropolitan Melbourne half of those building workers checked were referred to their doctors for further examination

Mr Lenders said that over the summer period of 2005/06 WorkSafe inspectors visited more than 500 workplaces across Victoria to ensure that employers were protecting employees from the dangers of

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skin cancer. Inspectors were only required to take action over breaches to the Occupational Health and Safety Act in only 26 workplaces.

“It is encouraging that most employers were doing the right thing but sadly some still aren't getting the message that work in the sun can kill.”

Source: The Minister For Workcover

Anti-toxin activists call on govt action after disturbing blood tests

SYDNEY, April 20 2006

The NSW and federal governments must immediately offer blood testing to all Sydney anglers and their families after blood samples from a group of fishermen revealed toxic chemical levels up to 10 times higher than average, activists say.

Blood samples taken from the group of fisherman who ate fish from the harbour three to four times each week showed high levels of dioxins in their blood, ABC Television reported last night.

Dioxins are toxic chemicals that can concentrate in body fat and cause serious skin lesions.

One fisherman who began fishing full-time in 1946 had more than 113 picograms per gram of dioxin in his blood - more than 10 times the Australian average.

The son of a fisherman also had dioxin levels seven times higher than the typical Australian child after eating prawns caught from the harbour.

The National Toxics Network (NTN) today said the NSW government and its federal counterpart now had a duty to immediately offer testing to all Sydney fishers and their families to determine the levels of poisonous dioxin in their blood.

“The release of data yesterday showing extremely high dioxin levels in fishers and their families has placed an urgent obligation on the federal and NSW governments to provide support to these families to ensure adequate monitoring and assistance,” they said in a statement. “They also have a broader obligation to Australian children and future generations to protect them and their food sources.”

Senior Adviser to the NTN, Dr Mariann Lloyd-Smith, said the focus should now be on the management of dioxin hotspots to protect “unsuspecting Australian families”.

NTN Coordinator Jo Immig said it was “highly disturbing” that according to the federal government's own risk assessment, Australian babies under three months were already absorbing up to 16 times the monthly dioxin intake.

“Why hasn't the NSW government acted before now?” she said. “They have known about this contamination for many years.”

The NTN said toxins, among many things, could cause cancer and birth defects, affect the immune system and disrupt male and female sexual development.

AAP

Adobe Acrobat 7.07 Information

Some readers have expressed difficulty in upgrading to the latest version of Acrobat Reader with one of the problems being that the download can be over 20 megabytes - a substantial burden to dial-up internet connections.

Safety At Work publishers are now allowed to distribute the latest edition of Acrobat Reader on a CD. If you want a copy of Acrobat Reader 7.07 please email me at jonesk@sia.org.au and include your full postal address. A CD will be mailed to you shortly after.

The CD won't be pretty as it is a burnt copy of the software that Adobe permits us to distribute. It is not allowed to be given to anyone other than the person requesting the CD and all CDs will be checked for viruses before distribution.

For those readers who are unconcerned about download limits, the latest version of Acrobat Reader is available for free from <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>

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