



# SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

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Issue 72 October 9 2006  
 ISSN 1832-6714  
 Supplied by SAFETY AT WORK magazine

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## Victims of Workers Compensation

September 29 2006

Most workers suffering long-term injuries are either left hopeless or seeking revenge due to a lack of support, according to new research findings to be presented at The Safety Conference in Sydney during October.

Dr Lynette Guy of the WorkCover NSW Research Centre of Excellence in Newcastle University found workers with chronic injuries fell into one of three groups: Disempowered; Empowered, and Seeking Revenge.

"Only the minority of people with chronic work-related injuries belong to the Empowered group," she said. "The consequences of living with chronic injury go beyond the medical diagnosis and are shaped by your socioeconomic status and whether you have support from your family, work and friends. The interactions with the workplace, insurance companies, lawyers and health professionals are also instrumental."

"One psychiatrist told me that getting back to work was not the pivotal issue for the disempowered group, it was simply staying alive."

Lack of support also led to hostility and aggression from other injured workers.

"Add the stigma of being injured and comments like 'He's only a bludger' or 'She's after compo - she doesn't really have a problem' to a lack of support and these workers feel they have to fight," Dr Guy said. "Professionals confirmed that the process itself is very distressing. To quote one doctor, 'Because they have to prove there's a problem and the problem is difficult to prove because it's a pain problem. There are all sorts of hoops which they have to jump through'."

The answer, says Dr Guy, is to support workers soon after the injury and avoid an adversarial approach. "Support from employers and the insurance companies is critical," she said. "Early intervention can save a lot of angst and money because it can help the person to recover, reducing lost time and avoiding litigation."

"Proper training of insurance company staff can make a difference, as does the training of workplace supervisors. Ultimately, the employer is often in the best position to help an injured person return to work but it's a sad irony that this is where the alienation often begins. A worker summed it up by saying: 'If only they'd bothered to call to say they cared.'"

Dr Guy will urge delegates at The Safety Conference to adopt a more supportive approach during her address on October 19.

Source:AEC

### Produce company fined after girl caught in conveyor belt

BRISBANE, October 3 2006

A south-east Queensland produce company has been fined \$60,000 after a five-year-old girl was seriously injured when she was caught up in a conveyor belt.

S P Exports Pty Ltd pleaded guilty in the Bundaberg Industrial Magistrates Court today to failing to ensure it complied with its workplace health and safety obligations.

The sole director of the company, Andrew Phillip, also pleaded guilty to a similar charge.

The court was told that on May 22 last year, an employee's daughter accompanied her father while he carried out his cleaning duties at the company's pack house in Childers.

She suffered a "major degloving injury" (involving loss of skin) to her chest and arm when her clothing became entangled in an unguarded rotating coupling

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bolt connected to a conveyor belt used to remove rubbish. Her injuries required extensive medical treatment and ongoing rehabilitation.

A Workplace Health and Safety Queensland investigation found the company knew the child went to the pack house with her parents while they carried out their cleaning work, but had not taken adequate steps to prevent the practice.

A report by an independent expert mechanical engineer said the coupling was located near the floor at a height well within reach of a five-year-old child.

The nearest stop switches did not have identification signs, were several metres from the coupling and would not be apparent to anyone unfamiliar to the plant. Components of a simple fixed guard, which would have prevented entanglement, were located behind an adjacent pump.

The court was told the company had three previous convictions for breaches of the Workplace Health and Safety Act, including an incident when a female worker's clothing was caught in a conveyor belt.

The company was fined \$60,000 and ordered to pay investigation, professional and court costs totalling \$13,035. Phillip was given a two-year good behaviour bond with a \$10,000 surety. No conviction was recorded against him, but a conviction was recorded against the company.

AAP

## **Australians lazy about eye protection: survey**      October 3 2006

More than 70 per cent of Australians do not protect their eyes when doing DIY repairs or improvements, a survey reveals.

An Optometrists Association Australia survey of 1,200 people shows DIY-ers are risking their eyesight by wearing prescription spectacles or sunglasses instead of proper eye protection.

Grinding and welding-related activities are the most common eye-related injuries, accounting for 29 per cent of presentations to hospitals and GPs.

Optometrists Association Australia national president Ian Bluntish said Australians were underestimating the risk of eye injury when doing tasks including mowing, painting, welding and pruning.

"People are under the illusion that a pair of sunglasses or prescription spectacles will protect their eyes from damage when they are doing handy work ... and this simply isn't true," he said.

AAP

## **Tree-lopper falls after being attacked by bees**      SYDNEY, October 4 2006

A NSW tree lopper fractured his hip and a number of ribs when he jumped seven metres to escape a swarm of bees.

The 27-year-old man was stung numerous times and also suffered suspected spinal injuries while working late this morning near Kendall, on the mid-north coast, a spokesman for the Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter said.

The man was clearing trees to make way for a power-line easement when he cut through a branch that contained the bees.

The bees caused the man to disconnect his safety rope and harness and jump, the spokesman said.

The man continued to be stung after he hit the ground and the bees swarmed around him long enough to initially prevent paramedics from approaching him. The man was flown to John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle where he remains in a stable condition, a hospital spokeswoman said.

AAP

## **Letter to the Editor**

Kevin

I was very interested in your information in relation to drug abuse by drivers of public transport vehicles.

I wonder at law what the ramifications are, and how the innocent victim of what I see as a crime if an incident has taken place on our roads causing death or injury due to drug abuse ?

I further note that the Transport operatives in Victoria want to have the Vic Government allow triple B road trains in built up areas, these will carry 4 x 20' or 2 x 40' sea containers they cite cost impact as the reason. I firmly believe that it is high time we adopted the European model on transport. One to save lives on the road, two to stop outrageous costs due to road damage.

The European model puts more freight on the freight liner system being rail city to city. The freight is then transferred to smaller local transport with less local impact. The drivers hours are recorded by tachograph and strictly controlled by the industries not the police.

Transport managers loose income if they allow or encourage drivers to flaunt the law, eg. a Transport manager is allocated a number of operator licences say 100, if the drivers are found breaking the rules the 100 licences are reduced, this actively cuts the earning potential of the operator. This system effectively puts the non compliant operator out of business.

This could apply to both cab drivers, bus operators and trucking companies saving our national revenue millions in policing systems, crash investigations and the like.

Thanks for your ongoing news letters

Regards John

Response

John

The questions that you pose are exactly the type of questions that I would like the SIA to consider or to debate.

Professionally, and personally, I cannot see how, on the basis of safety, a government can be considering increasing the size of cargo transport on the road network when there can be a viable alternative in rail. This week there was a released a study on the most unsafe stretches of road in Australia and, disappointingly, there were several long stretches that were on major cargo

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## Managers knew danger at Beaconsfield since January: report

October 7 2006

Safety experts warned the managers of Tasmania's Beaconsfield gold mine there was potential for "large and damaging seismic events" three months before the fatal rockfall that killed Larry Knight.

And miners claim key safety improvement recommendations were not implemented in the area where Knight lost his life and fellow miners Todd Russell and Brant Webb were trapped for two weeks.

Mining safety experts AMC Consultants warned in a confidential January report that damage to sections of the mine "extends beyond the support capacity", The Weekend Australian reports today.

The report was commissioned by mine management following a rock collapse in October 2005 mere metres from the famed Anzac Day rockfall site.

"Based on AMC's understanding of seismicity at Beaconsfield, the potential exists for further large and damaging seismic events," the report stated.

AMC made a swag of recommendations about improving ground support, finding mining activities and unfavourable mine geometry were to blame for the October collapse.

But miners said these recommendations were never applied to level 925, where Knight and his colleagues were working. This included increased cable and cone bolting, new safer mining methods, and greater intervals between mined areas.

"The miners told management time and time again 'You've got to leave pillars there' and they said 'There's too much gold there,'" said Mick Borrill, a drill operator who worked in 925.

In richer gold areas, the intervals dropped from 25 metres between mined areas to 10 metres, the miners said.

Mine chief geologist Peter Hills said AMC had recommended installing cone bolts in 925, but they were not "specifically recommended".

Allstate Operations, which controls the mine, declined to comment, saying the accident was still the subject of a Tasmanian government inquiry.

AAP

## Power Naps To Fight Night-shift Fatigue

October 1 2006

Medical staff working the night shift could benefit from a snappy ten-minute nap to regain alertness and improve performance, research has revealed.

In their editorial published in the latest Medical Journal of Australia, Associate Professor Doug McEvoy and Professor Leon Lack of Flinders University in Adelaide have looked into the benefits of short periods of shut-eye for medical staff working through the night.

"Night shift requires the health professional to work when the body's clock (circadian system) requires sleep," say Assoc Prof McEvoy. Interruptions to the circadian system can cause slowed reaction times, increased feelings of fatigue, impaired concentration and an increased risk of falling asleep on the job.

Assoc Prof McEvoy says the effect of fatigue on a health professional's performance is similar to that of a blood alcohol concentration of 0.05 – 0.10 per cent.

"The net result of this assault on sleep ... can be impaired patient safety, and the health and safety of health professionals themselves," he says. "One proposed counter-measure for excessive sleepiness is the use of strategically placed naps both before and during the night shift."

He recommends an afternoon nap, to take advantage of a natural dip in circadian rhythms.

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transport routes.

A further safety consideration is that each of the vehicles has the potential to be driven by a person who is drug-affected and impaired, where each multi-carriage rail delivery is in the care of a handful of drivers. My understanding is that rail transport systems have an established and effective random drug testing process. Certainly the rail drivers are far more accountable than road drivers.

Again, only this week in Victoria, a working group of regional and rural Mayors requested that the government (or Pacific National through its leasing) resurrect the freight rail routes so that regional industry and agriculture can benefit from transport costs and frequency without increasing the risk of death on the roads. I am fully aware of the substantial cost that rail track maintenance requires, through work I have undertaken for rail companies, but the benefit in transport costs, regional economic growth and reduced road toll is worth the expense.

Media reports in newspapers and my own publications indicate repeatedly that many major derailments have occurred around the world from inadequate rail track maintenance, often as a result of trading off safety against profit. Infrastructure improvement is a simple and important call but often too scary for politicians to make, because most politicians have no vision or commitment beyond their own terms. The truly memorable Australian politicians have been those who are willing to make the hard call because it is the right thing to do rather than the politically expedient. It is to these politicians that we safety professionals need to state our case, and it would be nice to see the SIA have an active role in that lobbying and decision-making.

Kevin Jones

Editor





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Naps of about ten minutes' duration produce improvements in alertness and performance without the post-nap grogginess that can be experienced after longer periods of one to two hours, Assoc Prof McEvoy says.

How long the effects of a ten-minute nap last, and whether they would work as well at 3am as they do at 3pm, are still being tested.

"The picture emerging from night-shift napping studies is similar to that from the afternoon studies," say Assoc Prof McEvoy. "Health professionals who work night shift should, for the sake of their own health and safety and that of their patients, consider the benefits of night-napping."

Source: The Medical Journal of Australia

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## **\$18 million upgrade for train safety**

October 3 2006

The NSW government will spend 18 million dollars on upgrading older train carriages to stop passengers getting caught in doors.

The announcement comes just weeks after RailCorp figures showed the number of train safety incidents had leapt by more than 200 per cent in the past four years.

But Transport Minister John Watkins claims there's been a 25 per cent reduction in the numbers of people getting caught in train doors since the introduction of the new timetable earlier this year.

The minister says the multi-million dollar upgrade will further reduce the risk of people or prams being caught in doors and dragged along platforms.

He says the new digital announcements will free up guards from making manual announcements .. giving them more time to closely watch passengers boarding and getting off.

Under the program .. traction interlocking systems .. which stop a train moving unless all doors are properly closed and free from obstruction .. will be fitted on 712 pre-Tangara carriages.

Digital announcements and orange lights that start flashing as doors close and keep flashing until every door is shut will also be installed. Another 447 carriages will get similar upgrades.

AAP

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## **Niddrie blast leaves man fighting for his life.**

Melbourne, 6 October 2006

A man remains in a serious condition in the burns unit at the Alfred Hospital four days after an explosion at a commercial construction site at Niddrie. He was carrying out welding work when a drum of a release agent, used to prevent concrete sticking to formwork, exploded. The welding was being done on top of the drum at the time of the blast.

The Director of WorkSafe's Construction and Utilities Division, Geoff Thomas, said the case was a tragic reminder that carrying out welding or cutting work near flammable materials carried enormous risks. "Keeping the source of heat or sparks away from flammable substances is essential. In some cases the way the work is done, or its timing might have to be changed. Explosions happen in an instant. Apart from those nearest the blast, passers-by and workers can be at risk not just from the blast itself, but flying debris and the risk of structural collapse.

This week's incident at Niddrie was Victoria's second explosion involving flammable products this year. In May, a man suffered severe burns at Moolap on the Bellarine Peninsula when a drum he was cutting exploded.

Source: WorkSafe

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## **ACT Health and Safety Month**

October 3 2006

Minister for Industrial Relations, Andrew Barr, today said workplace safety needed to be a partnership between business, employees and their unions, and the Government, if injuries were to be prevented.

Mr Barr made the comments while officially launching the ACT's annual Health and Safety Month which this year runs from 3 to 31 October.

"Opt for Safety in October, is the theme for health and safety month and it is important for all workplaces to think, talk and act on health and safety issues to stop injuries occurring," Mr Barr said. "While the ACT Government and ACT Workcover aim to educate, provide guidance and assess the level of compliance with occupational health and safety in workplaces, we also need to stimulate individual business' to take responsibility for their own safety management. An investment in safety not only keeps workers safe, it can also lead to reductions in insurance premiums."

Source: ACT Government

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## **WA considers more smoko bans**

October 3 2006

The "smoko" could become a thing of the past in more West Australian government workplaces.

State Health Minister Jim McGinty said today a government-wide ban on people taking breaks at work to smoke cigarettes was being considered.

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"It is only a question of time," Mr McGinty said. "The day of the smoko is gone."

Smoking on school grounds already is banned in WA.

Mr McGinty said the next most likely place to start was at hospitals before bans could be introduced at other public buildings. "We need a whole-of-government policy which will then be implemented depending on the circumstances," the minister said.

Only 15 per cent of people smoke in WA, and the state wants to lower the figure, he said. Mr McGinty said he believed many private employers already were introducing, or considering implementing, smoko bans.

AAP

## Near-Record Fine For Adventure Activity Offence

29 September 2006

An Industrial Magistrate has handed down a major penalty for a safety offence involving an adventure-style structure.

Today in the SA Industrial Relations Court, Wilderness Escape Outdoor Adventures Pty. Ltd. was convicted and fined \$36,000, following a prosecution brought by SafeWork SA.

The company pleaded guilty to breaching Section 22 of the Occupational Health Safety and Welfare Act 1986, in failing to ensure the safety of another person at a place under their management and control.

The court heard that while on a school camp in April 2004, a 12 year old boy participated in a climbing activity under the control and supervision of the defendant. During this exercise, a safety rope was tied incorrectly by the boy's teacher.

While descending from a height of 7 metres, the safety rope failed. The boy fell and landed heavily suffering compound fractures to both wrists and his left ankle. He is likely to need further treatment in future.

In his decision, Industrial Magistrate Stephen Lieschke found the defendant had failed in its duty of care in a number of areas:

- The defendant permitted an unqualified and untrained person to supervise the tie-in.
- The defendant failed to follow its own risk management plan by not observing the boy and correcting the mistaken procedure.
- There was no system for checking tie-ins

"This is a severe penalty for this kind of offence, and the largest since regulations concerning such structures were introduced in 2001," a SafeWork SA spokesman says. "It shows the importance of ensuring that the health and safety of the public is not compromised, particularly in adventure -oriented activities. The responsibility on these operators is greater, particularly as children who participate in these activities have no control over the safety risks they're exposed to in such circumstances," the spokesman says.

Source: SafeWork SA

## Heavy Fine Over Apprentice's Death

29 September 2006

In a prosecution brought by SafeWork SA, an employment provider has been fined \$60,000 over the death of an 18 year old first year engineering apprentice in an industrial accident two years ago.

Today the Engineering Employers Association SA Group Training Scheme was convicted and fined in the SA Industrial Relations Court after pleading guilty to breaching Section 19 of the Occupational Health Safety and Welfare Act 1986, in failing to ensure that an employee was safe from injury and risks to health while at work.

In delivering the penalty, Industrial Magistrate Stephen Lieschke described the defendant's offending as "very serious", and said "a penalty at the higher end of the scale is appropriate".

Eighteen year old Daniel Madeley was fatally injured on Saturday 5 June 2004, when his dustcoat became caught on the unguarded shaft of a horizontal borer at the Edwardstown premises of his host employer, Diemould Tooling Services Pty. Ltd. There was no automatic shutdown mechanism on the machine. Daniel suffered extensive injuries, and died in hospital the next day.

In his decision, Magistrate Lieschke found that in its role as a labour hirer and registered training provider, the Engineering Employers Association SA Group Training Scheme (EEAGTS) had:

- Failed to ensure that a hazard identification and risk assessment were carried out on the machine.
- Failed to ensure that safe operating procedures existed and were communicated.
- Failed to ensure the deceased was trained by an experienced tradesperson.
- Failed to ensure the deceased received available formal training on the use of the machine.
- Failed to ensure the deceased had been properly assessed in general machining, and
- Failed to ensure the deceased received reasonably necessary supervision.

Magistrate Lieschke said there was no evidence to suggest Daniel Madeley was careless in any way. EEAGTS is the secondary defendant in this case. A separate prosecution is currently underway against Diemould Tooling Services Pty. Ltd. with the next hearing due in late October.





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SafeWork SA says the case is a stark and tragic reminder of the responsibility and duty of care that employers have when placing their employees with host-employers. A SafeWork SA spokesman says, "It is simply not enough to rely on the diligence of host employers. Positive steps must be taken to ensure the safety of all employees. It also further highlights the special attention that all employers must give to the health and safety of young and inexperienced workers," the spokesman says.

SafeWork SA

## New study tackles workplace stress

October 6 2006

Stressed workers take more leave and cost employers millions in compensation claims but the first step towards a solution could be as simple as asking employees what worries them, a study has found.

The findings of a new Victorian WorkCover Authority (VWA) study, to be presented by Elizabeth Pratt at The Safety Conference in Sydney during October, showed dramatic improvements in absenteeism in just months. Stress-related injuries make up a growing proportion of the 30,000 or so workers compensation claims filed in Victoria each year, amounting to almost \$134 million.

"Stress-related claims are traditionally more complex to manage for VWA, their agents and service providers, and cost employers more. Roughly double the amount of compensation is paid to workers suffering from stress than those with physical injuries," Ms Pratt said.

Workers in the public sector account for one in five workers compensation claims, compared to 7 per cent of claims in the private sector. In response, WorkCover, together with the Department of Education and Training (DET), Department of Human Services (DHS) and unions, piloted an innovative program aimed at addressing stress. At the beginning of the study, over 30 per cent of workers in both DET and DHS reported they felt stressed at work – three times the Australian average.

Health and safety representatives, employees and their supervisors met to identify stressful work conditions and make action plans to address them, which were then implemented with the support of management. The result was a decrease in the psychological distress levels, matched with impressive productivity gains. Workers whose stress levels fell were at least 30 per cent less likely to be absent from work. Ms Pratt said the study offered clear lessons for employers.

"Consultation followed by action was key," she said. "While talking about stress gave the issue greater prominence, merely talking about it did not reduce its occurrence - only the structured implementation of agreed actions brought about this outcome."

Ms Pratt will detail the research findings at The Safety Conference during her address on October 17. For more information on Australian Exhibitions & Conferences visit [www.thesafetyshow.com](http://www.thesafetyshow.com)

Source:AEC

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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>

SIA Safety At Work Bulletin  
Issue 72, October 9, 2006  
ISSN 1832-6714

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Designer/Publisher:  
Workplace Safety Services Pty Ltd  
849 High Street, Regent VIC 3073 Australia  
A.B.N. 68 091 088 621  
[www.safetyatwork.biz](http://www.safetyatwork.biz)

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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