One of the authors of a five year research program into Australia’s occupational health and safety inspectorates says greater union influence is essential to workplace safety.

The University of NSW’s Professor Michael Quinlan, FSIA (pictured below) spoke out today, ahead of his April 2 address to the Safety In Action Conference in Melbourne, about the findings of his study with Richard Johnstone.

“… unions haven’t pursued safety as much as they should have and I don’t see employers moaning about that particularly,” Professor Quinlan said in a Safety Institute of Australia podcast.

“Having said that, I think we should be very careful to remember from history, that in fact it is unions that played a very significant part in campaigns which brought about health and safety legislation in the first place, workers’ compensation legislation in the first place and the reforms of health and safety legislation.”

In response to remarks that unions might be abusing OHS-related powers to deal with an industrial relations agenda, the Professor said “…there’s been an ongoing argument for a long time that health and safety should be quarantined from industrial relations. That is never going to be possible because…you can have an issue like staffing levels in a workplace, you can have an issue about work organisation, about the use of contractors. Those sorts of issues are going to…have health and safety aspects, they’re going to have job security aspects to that issue, they’re going to have other industrial relations issues, so the idea that you can run health and safety as an entirely separate agenda to industrial relations, I think is intellectually and factually flawed.”

“In practice, you don’t find a health and safety rep in a workplace where there’s no union. As many incidents will demonstrate…where you don’t have effective worker and union input, you have serious problems with health and safety.”

Provided that unions and inspectorates were adequately resourced, Professor Quinlan said criticisms that Australian OHS legislation modelled on Robens principles was too soft were largely unjustified.

“My impression from going on workplace visits and dealing with inspectors, looking at employers and others in those situations, is that it’s ironic that we’re getting this sort of criticism,” he said.”In all honesty, the legislation we’ve got today is the best we’ve ever had so anyone who wants to criticise it and the enforcement and other activities that goes
Letters to the Editor
If you have any safety issues to discuss, or concerns about SafetyWeek itself, please consider communicating with the Editor through natadmin@sia.org.au.

Conference Workshops
Prior to the Safety In Action 2009 conference several workshops have been organised.
Sally Bennett, of Enhance Solutions, will be talking about “Making Behavioural Safety Work in the Australian Context”
Howard Whitton, of The Ethicos Group, will conduct two workshops on “Managing Ethics and Values - Beyond the Code of Conduct”. More information on Howard Whitton is available on page 3.
Registrations for the seminars are at http://tinyurl.com.au/x.php?1o1c

Welding Fumes And Gases Seminars
The SIA is a proud strategic partner of the Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists (AIOH), through forums such as the Congress of Occupational Safety and Health Association Presidents (COSHAP) and the Health and Safety Professionals Alliance (HaSPA).
Under this partnership, Ms Kerrie Burton, the AIOH Education Co-ordinator, has provided information on Welding Fumes and Gases Seminars planned to be conducted by the AIOH during March and April 2009 in various locations around Australia and has again kindly extended an invitation with it, I’d want to see some hard evidence of the problems and more importantly, I’d like to see a convincing alternative.”
“I’m not saying there aren’t problems…but overall the shift has been, in my view, a positive one with some important caveats about the need for essential infrastructure such as having a union movement strong enough to be able to have effective representation and interest in health and safety on the ground. But that would apply under any legislative regime and maintaining a sufficiently resourced and well-trained inspectorate.”
Professor Quinlan said that while better trained than ever before, inspectorates “…still don’t have enough resources to do the job…”.
Professor Quinlan will present his keynote address to the Safety In Action Conference, which runs from March 31 to April 2 in 2009 at the Melbourne Convention Centre and also marks the 60th anniversary of host, the Safety Institute of Australia. The full interview with Professor Quinlan plus video footage from the 2008 conference can be viewed at www.siaconference.com.au.

Bundall (Gold Coast) – building evacuation 6 February 2009
A five storey business centre at Bundall was evacuated around 8:45am when smoke set off the building’s fire alarm. Firefighters detected a strong smell of smoke on the fourth level and used thermal imaging equipment to try and locate the source of the smoke. Power to the building was shut off while investigations continued. Firefighters believe the incident may have been caused by an electrical fault and left the scene in the hands of management and the electricity provider once they had declared the area safe. One of the occupants of the building was transported to Gold Coast Hospital with smoke inhalation.

Many injured workers believe their employer hinders their recovery 29 January 2008
A national return to work report, prepared for The Heads of Workers’ Compensation Authorities last year, shows that one in four injured workers throughout Australia and New Zealand believe that management do not do enough to get them back to work. Nor do they have clear policies and procedures about returning injured workers to work.
One in four also identify at least one person making it harder for them to return to work with the majority stating it was their supervisor or employer that hindered their progress. Statistics shows that these workers were less likely to have a durable return to work compared to those who found those involved in the RTW process to be helpful.
“Return to Work Matters,” an online resource and network for employers and return to work professionals, regularly publishes research translations that confirm the findings that both employer responses and the employee’s beliefs about their employers attitude impacts on recovery.
“With all this evidence, employers should not only be educating themselves on best practice”, says Return to Work Matters’ General Manager Cheryl Griffiths. “But should be passing this knowledge on to their employees so everyone knows exactly where they stand. Employees look to their employers for advice on training, superannuation, wages and OH&S, yet when it comes to return to work after injury or illness, workers are often left to their own devices.”
“The Return to Work Matters website was developed to provide this much needed knowledge to employers,” says Ms Griffiths. “The site includes access to advice, handbooks and guides, case studies, tools, and includes links to resources that influence compensation, absenteeism and workplace culture. It is a vital knowledge tool for return to work professionals”.
Return to Work Matters are currently re-launching their site (www.rtwmatters.org) with many new resources; most notably a comprehensive database with descriptive links to

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Please RSVP by the 27th February
A light lunch will be provided.

key members of Safety Groups in
inaugural Safety Group Forum for
Safety Institute of Australia ran the
219 Mickleham Rd, Tullamarine
Location: Safety Institute
Time: 10:00am - 1:00pm

seminars.
SIA members will also be eligible to
earn one Continuing Professional
SIA members are being offered a
10% discount on the non-member
price. The AIOH has requested
that SIA members wishing to
attend a seminar should identify
themselves on the registration
form as an SIA member to receive
the discounted registration fee.
SIA members will also be eligible to
earn one Continuing Professional Development (CPD) point from attendance at such one-day seminars.

Safety Group Forum
Date: 3rd March 2009
Time: 10:00am - 1:00pm
Location: Safety Institute of Australia National Office 2/217-219 Mickleham Rd, Tullamarine
Safety Institute of Australia ran the inaugural Safety Group Forum for key members of Safety Groups in Victoria in September 2008.
A light lunch will be provided.
Please RSVP by the 27th February

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over 200 of the best RTW resources and websites worldwide. From medical to people, workplace or system issues, if it’s important to illness or injury rehabilitation then it’s on their site.

Return to Work Matters is guided by people who have for decades taken leadership roles in occupational medicine, return to work facilitation, policy development and professional network support.

Gavin – Rescue From Tree

Firefighters used aerial appliances to free a man who was stuck up a large tree on Hammond Drive at Gaven around 12.30pm. It is believed the man’s harness broke while tree lopping.
The man was not injured.

Upcoming Seminar from Global Expert on Professional Ethics

By Kevin Jones, BA, FSIA

Howard Whitton (pictured right) is one of those Australians who are obscure but when brought to one’s attention you feel guilty that you did not know of him. I first heard Howard speak at an ethics seminar in Melbourne in early 2008. I attended from curiosity because the safety profession, by and large, in Australia has paid lip-service to professional ethics, and still does. I attended an Ergonomics Society conference almost ten years ago in Sydney where one of the speakers, a member of the society, spoke about professional ethics. Apparently that it was the first time that the Ergonomics conference had ever “discussed” ethics.

Other organizations profess to have an ethics procedure but this is shrouded in secrecy making it difficult for members to know the ethical parameters of a profession. Professional ethics come from open and active discussion of issues such as conflict of interest, confidentiality, whistleblowing, rather than developing a few sheets on professional conduct and thinking the process has ended.

Howard’s presentation in Melbourne surprised. It was in plain English, and overwhelmingly relevant. Howard had a professional film scenario that he based his presentation on. The film involved all the elements of a road construction program from political pressure, safety compliance, environmental considerations, resource allocation, and personal choice. It showed the decision-making processes that safety professional frequently face themselves or have an active role in. It was a microcosm of the project manager’s contemporary role.

The moments I remember are when bones are discovered in the construction project. This echoed the need to manage a project in sensitive environmental areas. One of the workers takes photos of each stage of the project as a hobby, without realizing the photos could be evidence. The project manager is already working within the project parameters when a political (undocumented) element appears that substantially affects the project.

I had half-expected a dry academic discussion and ended up in a fascinating safety-themed debate. If there was one SIA seminar that I would attend this year it would be one of Howard’s workshops being held in late-March in Melbourne, prior to the Safety In Action Conference (http://www.siaconference.com.au).

For those members who, like me, weren’t aware of Howard Whitton, I would strongly recommend you look at the online resources listed below.

According to the Ethicos website:

“Following a career as a public servant in Australia, Howard has worked since 1999 in 11 countries as a specialist consultant on Public Sector Ethics, Conflict of Interest, Whistleblower Protection, institutional integrity systems, ethics codes, disciplinary investigations, and training/capacity-building in ‘Ethical Competence’;
SIA Fellow Questions

This week’s contributor is Tony Smith, FSIA. Tony is very active on OHS in the Gippsland region of Victoria and is employed as Manager Business Risk and Compliance at East Gippsland Water.

What sparked your interest in safety management?

I was thrust into it by accident as an Air Force Officer when appointed as a Unit OHS Adviser as a secondary duty. I completed the RAAF 8-day OHS Adviser course (as it was then) in 1995 and never looked back. I performed a number of Unit OHS Adviser roles, culminating in my appointment as a Base OHS Adviser back in the ‘old days’ when it was a senior officer appointment. The RAAF funded my Grad Dip OHS and I eventually left the RAAF in 2000 to pursue a full-time OHS career.

Why did you join the Safety Institute of Australia?

Professional development - where better than via our own professional association?

What is the easiest action a person can do to make their own workplaces safer?

Talk about safety! Ask questions and take the time to listen and learn. Find a good coach/mentor/role model - a valuable action for OHS professionals - new and old.

How important is a tertiary education in occupational safety?

For a safety professional, I think that a tertiary education (degree or Grad Dip) is a very important element in conjunction with experience. Apart from teaching important fundamentals, tertiary education usually extends one’s thought processes. However, an OHS degree alone does not mean an expert make!

Have you ever been involved with a ‘near miss’?

As a former WorkSafe Inspector.

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we would not need to wait long for the government to release the report but that safety professionals should be aware that there remains an extensive consultative process yet to be undertaken before the law is enacted by all States some time in 2011.

An exposure draft of the legislation is due by May 2009, followed by four months of public comment. This will lead to the presentation of a draft Bill to the Workplace Relations Ministers Council. Sherriff acknowledged that the timeframe is very tight particularly when considering that all Codes of Practice and support documentation will also need to be completed by the end of 2011.

Julie Honore of SafeSearch brought the audience up-to-date with her company’s latest annual OHS remuneration survey which will be released shortly.

In short, the breakfast seminar was a great way to launch the OHS year and the Safety Institute’s activities.

Comcare Seeks Comments On Synthetic Mineral Fibres Code
14 January 2009

According to the Comcare website, employers, employees and other stakeholders in the Comcare scheme are invited to submit comments on proposed changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Code of Practice 2008 – Part 13 Synthetic Mineral Fibres (SMF).

The proposed changes aim to bring Part 13 of the OHS Code in line with current scientific knowledge. In particular, the changes mean that glass wool, rock wool and slag wool are no longer considered carcinogenic.

The production and use of SMF has increased in recent years as it is used to replace asbestos. However, industry groups maintain that the OHS Code can have a negative impact on business by not recognising current information on the carcinogenic status of SMF.


The consultation period closes on 20 February 2009.

Source: Comcare

Bar Workers Who Smoke Also Benefit From Smoking Ban
10 February 2009

The health of bar workers, who actively smoke cigarettes, significantly improves after the introduction of a smoking ban, reveals research published ahead of print in Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

The findings are based on 371 bar workers from 72 Scottish bars, whose symptoms and lung function were assessed before the implementation of the ban on smoking in enclosed public places, and then two and 12 months afterwards.

In all, 191 workers underwent all three assessments, and the proportion reporting any respiratory symptoms fell from 69% to 57% after one year. The proportion of those with sensory symptoms (runny nose, red eyes, sore throat) also fell from 75% to 64%.

Among non-smokers the proportion of those with phlegm and red eyes fell, respectively, from 32% to 14%, and from 44% to 18%.

But the effects were also seen among those who continued to smoke themselves. The proportions of smokers reporting wheeze fell from almost half (48%) to one in three
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2. Find someone to discuss concerns with, especially if the workplace doesn’t support a consultative approach.

Have you ever been injured at work? If so, how?
A sports-related MSD while in the RAAF. Thankfully, no other significant injuries.

If old enough how different was safety management before the legislative changes in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s?

Didn’t really have much awareness of this period - not that old!

What was your first real job and how safe would you say it was?
Sales assistant in a major department store in 1975 - 1977 - wore a suit and tie and addressed fellow staff as Mr, Mrs or Miss - all very formal.

Can’t recall any dedicated safety training, although formal induction lasted about a week (far longer than the kids seem to get these days). In retrospect though, I can’t recall any unsafe conditions or high risk tasks either.

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... and those reporting breathlessness fell from 42% to 29%.

The authors conclude that their findings reinforce the benefits on health of a smoking ban in public places, but they also show that those who continue to smoke also stand to gain.

It is thought that the ban may have boosted the numbers of smokers indulging their habit at home, so exposing their children to greater levels of environmental tobacco smoke. More attention now needs to be paid to this, the authors warn.


Source: Journal of Occupational And Environmental Medicine

Toowoomba Company Fined $35,000 Over Injury To Teenager

5 February 2009

A Toowoomba manufacturing company was fined $35,000 after a teenage visitor to the workplace was injured in November 2007.


The court heard the teenager was at the workplace with his father. While he was on one side of a truck, his father, on the other side, loosened a chain holding the load on the trailer. The load fell on the teenager causing crush injuries and fractures to his pelvis and right ankle.

The Court found the company had no systems in place for loading and unloading trucks, and although there was a policy that friends and relatives of workers should not attend the workplace, the circumstances suggested this should be better enforced.

Subsequently, the company took steps to avoid any similar incident by implementing a documented system for loading and unloading trailers.

Industrial Magistrate Ms Kay Ryan also ordered the company to pay investigation professional and court costs of $2,721.85.

Ms Ryan took account of the company’s otherwise good record, the fact that it cooperated with the investigation and was a good corporate citizen. No conviction was recorded.

Source: Department of Employment and Industrial Relations

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