



# SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

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

Issue 8 June 27 2005 ISSN 1832-6714

Website: [www.sia.org.au](http://www.sia.org.au)

Email: [natadmin@vic.sia.org.au](mailto:natadmin@vic.sia.org.au)

Supplied by SAFETY AT WORK magazine

## QUICKSCAN

- Senators call for silicosis inquiry** 1
- Safety concerns raised in children's work-hours report** 2
- Parents elated after HMAS Westralia verdict** 2
- IOSH has concerns over half-scholarship offer** 2
- Tasmanian Corporate Manslaughter Report** 3
- Man dies after being tapped under a big rig** 3
- New safety Code for sugar industry** 3
- Company pleads guilty after man crushed by eight tones of glass** 3
- New forklift safety initiative** 4
- Federal Parliament sees new OHS Bill** 4
- Coal train derailment - near miss** 4
- New campaign for safety of roadside worker** 4
- Monday's is the worst day for workplace accidents** 5
- Union calls for urgent safety action on ambulances** 5

It began in the *Weekend Australian* newspaper on June 18, a workplace safety-related article on page 3. That was enough to get any safety practitioner's interest.

The Australian Democrats joined ACT Liberal Senator Gary Humphries in calling for a Senate inquiry into lung disease that experts warn could rival asbestosis.

Silicosis is a fatal lung disease caused by inhaling sand dust.

Medical experts have well-established evidence confirming a link between sandblasting and the fatal lung disease which is starting to appear in workers who have been exposed to silica particles.

Leader of the Australian Democrats, Senator Lyn Allison, said a Senate Inquiry should investigate the health impact of exposure to silica and other hazardous material in the workplace.

Thousands of workers in the 1960s and 1970s worked for years on end, breathing in these deadly particles without any respiratory protection, long after these practises had been banned in other states and industries Senator Allison said.

The deadly results from this exposure are becoming more and more prevalent and it is time we assessed the real impact of the disease.

Sandblasting has been progressively banned since the 1980s or controlled through the use of face masks and breathing apparatus.

Senator Allison said given the disease has an incubation period of 15 years or more, many sandblasters suffering from silica-induced injuries have still not been diagnosed, or their illness has been attributed to an alternative cause.

This is a potentially disastrous nation-wide problem with evidence suggesting the effects could well emulate the James Hardie asbestos scandal, Senator Allison said.

This Inquiry is urgently needed to assess the health, financial and social burden of the disease and to look at ways to compensate for this disaster.

Her call for the inquiry was supported in the article by Dr Faunce of Australian National University who said that there was sufficient documentation available to justify an inquiry.

Senator Humphries said there was clear evidence that a number of workers were affected by lung diseases and the connection with workplace exposure deserved to be comprehensively examined.

"Australia was engaging in practices, particularly related to sandblasting, long after ... unprotected use of sandblasting techniques had been banned in other parts of the world," he said.

## Silicosis: The New Asbestos?

By Kevin Jones

"In Britain, for example, sandblasting in an unprotected way was banned as early as 1949, but in the 1970s people (in Australia)... were still engaging in those practices in their workplaces without any form of protection whatsoever."

The Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union, not surprisingly, has thrown its weight behind a Senate inquiry into the extent of silicosis, and the ongoing risk of silica exposure to workers in many industries.

CFMEU NSW Secretary Andrew Ferguson said many people were comparing silica dust to asbestos; a silent killer that takes years to strike.

"Medical experts have confirmed that exposure to fine silica particles can cause silicosis, which is a deadly disease not dissimilar to Mesothelioma, and other asbestos related diseases," he said.

"This is a major issue for the thousands of Australian workers unknowingly exposed in the past due to poorer work practices, but it is also an ongoing issue of concern for those currently employed in industries where silica dust is a major problem, and exposure is potentially ongoing.

"In Sydney, with large scale tunnel projects cutting through sandstone and large amounts of excavation for building work, there are still thousands of workers, and even local residents, who may be at risk from silica exposure.

"This Senate inquiry needs to occur immediately, and the findings must be quickly acted upon, unlike many recent inquiries, to make sure silica does not become the new asbestos."

Several speakers on this issue mention a possible parallel with the James Hardie Asbestos row but the CFMEU is closer to the issue. We should not be looking at silicosis solely as a compensation issue as the unsafe work practices continue today. Any possible inquiry needs to acknowledge the continuing risk of inhaling silica dust and coordinate a stop to the use of the product until adequate and enforceable control measures can be introduced. It would be irresponsible to acknowledge a hazard and allow the hazard to continue while an inquiry focuses on compensation. The best way to minimise compensation is to eliminate the hazard.

A longer article on the call for a silicosis inquiry is available on page 20 of the *Weekend Australian* or by entering "silicosis" at the website <http://www.news.com.au/>

Source: CFMEU, AAP, Australian Democrats, The Australian

Continued on page 2





# SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

## One in 10 NSW kids work more than 15 hours a week: report

June 19 2005

Nearly one in 10 children aged 12 to 16 work more than 15 hours a week, a new study has found.

A groundbreaking report released today by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People reveals new information about the working experiences of 11,000 high school students aged between 12 and 16 years.

"The Children at Work study is the first of its kind in Australia to explore children's work and the important contribution they make to businesses and the community," said NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People Gillian Calvert.

"The majority of kids we surveyed said they enjoy their work because they learn new skills, meet new people, it makes them feel more responsible and they like having their own money to spend. However, the report also highlighted some serious concerns such as safety and the verbal and physical harassment of children in the workplace."

The research shows that there is considerable diversity to kids' work, from babysitting and working in retail outlets to making deliveries, teaching and helping on the family farm.

Other key findings include:

- Over half of children in Years 7 to 10 work in NSW
- Over two-thirds of children get paid for working
- Most kids work less than 6 hours a week but nearly one in 10 work more than 15 hours
- More girls than boys work and children's work hours increase with age
- Kids in rural areas are nearly twice as likely to work than kids in metropolitan areas
- Sydney's children are paid the highest rates and work longer hours
- Children living in the most disadvantaged areas are more likely to be seriously injured
- Kids who work spend more time on homework and other household tasks than kids who don't work.

"Nothing of this size or kind has been done in Australia before and it gives us a clearer picture of children's work experiences and the way that children's work impacts on their well-being," Ms Calvert said.

A taskforce including children is being set up to closely examine issues raised by the Children at Work report. The taskforce will develop recommendations for government, non-government, industry and the community to help protect kids and keep their work experiences positive and enjoyable. AAP

The full report is available for download at <http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/files/ChildrenatworkreportFinal.pdf>

## HMAS Westralia parents elated after ADI guilty verdict

18 June 2005

Parents of sailors killed in the 1998 HMAS Westralia fire have welcomed a Perth court's decision to find defence contractor ADI guilty of failing to provide a safe workplace.

Brian Smith and Lyndon Pelly are the parents of Shaun Smith and Megan Pelly, who were among four sailors who perished in the Navy fuel tanker's engine room blaze.

They say they are ecstatic at the decision handed down by Magistrate Peter Malone in Perth Magistrate's Court yesterday.

Mr Malone ruled ADI had failed in its obligation to provide a safe working environment by installing inappropriate

flexible fuel hoses on the HMAS Westralia, resulting in the deadly fire.

The decision came only a day after a Senate inquiry found the Australian Defence Force should be stripped of much of its power to investigate complaints of abuse and crime.

Mr Smith and Mr Pelly say the ADI ruling will put further pressure on the federal government to ensure positive change in military inquiry processes.

The Senate inquiry into Australia's military justice system heard stories of suicide, racism and violence, drug use and abuse of power in training schools and cadet units.

Families told of their children taking their own lives after being humiliated by fellow personnel and re-abused by the justice system, which often took years without a proper result.

The report's key recommendation was that all suspected criminal activity be referred to state civilian police for investigation and prosecution before civilian courts and that suspected criminal activity outside Australia be investigated by federal police.

Perth man Brian Smith, whose son Petty Officer Shaun Smith, 29, died with three others on HMAS Westralia when fire engulfed the engine room on May 5, 1998, said he had campaigned for years for a change in the military inquiry processes.

"I'm elated that our work of seven years ... has finally developed into something," Mr Smith said. "The senators coming out and saying 'this system is broken, it is definitely no good and can't be fixed, it has to be absolutely revamped', I think it is tremendous. It is just not the suicides, it really started with Westralia when we kept pushing, saying the (military) board of inquiry was wrong, it was a whitewash."

In Perth Magistrates Court today, Magistrate Peter Malone convicted ADI of failing in its obligation to provide a safe workplace by installing inappropriate flexible fuel hoses on the warship, resulting in a fire in 1998.

ADI, which was charged following an investigation by Comcare, the federal government's workers' compensation insurer, last year pleaded not guilty to the charge and a trial began on May 3. During the trial, Commonwealth prosecutor Stephen Hall, SC, said ADI had not followed the navy's instructions to investigate if the switch from rigid to flexible fuel hoses was appropriate, and did not have qualified people advising on, or approving, the work.

He said ADI, as the government contractor, was obliged to ensure the hoses were fit for use, and in not doing so, had exposed naval personnel to harm and breached the Commonwealth Occupational Health and Safety Act.

An ADI spokesman said today the company was reviewing the court's decision. AAP

## IMPORTANT NOTICE

### Half scholarships not linked with IOSH

17 June 2005

The following statement was issued by IOSH in the United Kingdom on June 17.

"IOSH (the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health), Europe's largest body for occupational safety and health (OSH) professionals, wishes to make clear that it is not linked with "half scholarships" currently being offered to the IOSH 2006 Conference by an organisation called 'OHS Daily News' to OSH professionals in Australia and New Zealand.

The "scholarships" are offered via an email from the "Editor" (no name) of the publication and on applying, we are informed, applicants have been requested to send money. IOSH has not set ticket prices for IOSH 06 yet, nor have we started to sell tickets."

Continued on page 3



Continued from page 2

## Tasmania's Law Reform Institute has released a report into "Corporate Manslaughter"

June 17 2005

The State Government today welcomed the release of a Tasmanian Law Reform Institute issues paper on matters relating to industrial manslaughter.

The Minister for Infrastructure, Energy and Resources, Bryan Green, and the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Judy Jackson, said that the paper raised issues associated with legislative remedies where death or injury occurs as a result of the activities of organisations.

"Following the State ALP Conference in 2004 the State Government decided to undertake research into whether there was a need to introduce industrial manslaughter legislation," Mr Green said.

"It is timely that this issues paper has been released", Ms. Jackson commented, "As the outcome of the comments received, together with any recommendations, will be useful in considering possible legislative changes."

Both Ministers encourage input from any stakeholder, organisation or interest group by the response closure date of 1 August.

Below is a statement from the Law Reform Institute relating to the Issues Paper.

"This new paper is concerned with the criminal law that applies when corporations and other entities wrongfully cause the death or serious injury of a natural person. This is most likely to be relevant to workplace deaths and

injuries or 'public disasters' (for example a gas explosion or a ferry sinking). The law already allows corporations to be found guilty of criminal offences, however difficulties arise when considering traditional crimes like manslaughter or grievous bodily harm which have evolved to deal with the actions of moving, thinking, animate people.

One issue in Tasmania is that manslaughter requires a homicide, which is defined as 'the killing of a human being by another', thus apparently excluding organizations. A broader issue is the method of attributing criminal liability to organizations given that they do not physically 'do' anything and do not have any 'state of mind'. The common law has tried to circumvent this by attributing to the company the actions and state of mind of the person (or people) who can be said to be the 'controlling mind' of the company. This is known as the identification doctrine. However the practices of modern corporate decision making rarely fall within the doctrine, particularly in larger corporations, where decisions are by necessity

## Man Dies After Being Caught Beneath Big Rig

June 22 2005

A man has died after being caught beneath the wheels of a moving big rig in far north Queensland.

Police said 58-year-old John Magann was loading an excavator on to the truck when it slipped and rolled backwards about 11.40am (AEST) yesterday at Jungarra near Cairns.

Police said it appeared Mr Magann, of Cairns, tried to enter the cabin of the prime mover, with a semi-trailer attached, while it was moving in a bid to regain control of the truck.

"Initial investigations indicate that the man suffered fatal injuries when he was caught beneath the wheels of the vehicle," a police spokeswoman said.

The traffic accident investigation squad and workplace health and safety are still investigating the incident.

AAP

taken at the branch, unit or middle management level.

The difficulties with the identification doctrine indicate a need to reform this area of law. Reform has already taken place on a federal level in Australia and Canada as well as in the Australian Capital Territory. A number of other jurisdictions including the United Kingdom, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales have also considered reform, or are in the process of doing so. The issues paper discusses three different types of reform that have been adopted or proposed in these jurisdictions –

- Introducing a specific 'industrial manslaughter' offence to the Code: This option has been considered by a number of jurisdictions, with the ACT becoming the first to implement the reform in 2004. The introduction of related specific offences (negligently causing serious injury and specific 'senior officer' offences) is also discussed.
- Introducing reforms to the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995: This could include introducing:
  - o manslaughter and grievous bodily harm provisions
  - o breach of duty causing death or grievous bodily harm provisions – higher maximum penalties
  - o a broader range of penalties
  - o senior officer liability (in an effort to encourage organizational compliance)
- Introducing specialised principles of criminal responsibility for organizations: This option would involve amending the criminal responsibility chapter of the Criminal Code, so that it sets out how physical elements and mental elements can be proved when dealing with an organization.

The issues paper also considers sentencing organizations. Currently, the type of sentence usually imposed on a corporation is a fine. In many instances a fine may be ill suited to achieving the aims of punishment such as denunciation and deterrence, particularly in relation to serious breaches of the law that cause death or serious injury. This paper argues that while traditional sentencing options may be effective in some instances, the potential flexibility of these options is not currently being realised, and furthermore, in many cases sentencing options more specifically designed to deal with organizations are required.

Any group or person is invited to respond to this issues paper. Following consideration of all responses it is intended that a final report will be published, containing recommendations.

The Institute invites responses to the Issues Paper by 1 August 2005. "

The full report is available for download at [http://www.law.utas.edu.au/reform/Publications/Criminal%20Liability%20of%20Organizations/CrimLiabOrgIssuesPaper\\_9June05.pdf](http://www.law.utas.edu.au/reform/Publications/Criminal%20Liability%20of%20Organizations/CrimLiabOrgIssuesPaper_9June05.pdf)

Source: Tasmania Law Reform Institute, Tasmanian Minister for Infrastructure, Energy and Resources and Tasmania's Attorney-General

## Sugar Industry Code

The Queensland Department of Industrial Relations has released an updated Code of Practice for the sugar industry. It is available for download at [http://www.whs.qld.gov.au/sugar/sugarcode\\_may05.pdf](http://www.whs.qld.gov.au/sugar/sugarcode_may05.pdf)

## Company pleads guilty to unsafe work environment after man dies

June 20 2005

A man died when he was crushed by eight tonnes of glass sheets that toppled from a forklift used instead of an overhead crane, a court heard today.

Continued on page 4



# SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

Continued from page 3

Glass manufacturing company Pilkington Operations Ltd pleaded guilty to two counts of failing to provide a safe working environment today at the Victorian County Court over the incident on November 10, 2001.

Crown prosecutor Mike Sargent told the court that Hung Nguyen Huu, a 40-year-old worker at the company for 17 years, was directing the forklift driver in a warehouse at the Dandenong factory, in Melbourne's south-east.

The forklift was carrying four packs of glass sheets that weighed almost two tonnes each, the court heard. As the forklift was reversing the load toppled forward, crushing Mr Huu who was in front of the forklift. The court heard the straps used to secure the glass sheets on the forklift were not adequate, the overhead crane normally used to move the glass sheets was not available and the forklift was used instead. AAP

## Collaboration raises the bar on forklift safety

22 June 2005

The dangers of forklifts in Victorian workplaces are being highlighted in new industry guidance material launched today by WorkSafe Victoria.

WorkSafe's Executive Director, John Merritt, said forklifts had killed 54 Victorians since 1985 and injured many more. The most recent death was in April at Laverton when a man was struck by the falling load from a forklift.

"A medium-sized forklift weighs about the same as the average dump truck. They can also cause the same amount of damage and injury. The surprising thing is that some workplaces still do not understand this simple message. If you had a dump truck in your workplace there would be strict controls on where and how fast they could go, what they carried and how loads were secured. The same must be the case for forklifts," Mr Merritt said.

WorkSafe's 24-page booklet 'Forklift safety - reducing the risk, forklift instability' reminds employers, forklift operators and others in the workplace that if the machines are not used safely there is a high risk of serious injury or death.

"It won't be intended, but equally, it won't be an 'accident' as these incidents can be prevented. In places where forklifts are used, everyone needs to understand the potential risks and work to eliminate them," Mr Merritt said.

Source: WorkSafe Victoria

## Laws to Modernise OHS Introduced Into Parliament

23 Jun 2005

Laws to streamline outdated occupational health and safety requirements have been introduced into the federal parliament.

The proposed laws would make it easier for both employees and employers to decide how best to reduce any risks to workplace health and safety. Previous laws effectively denied the right of more employees to be involved in occupational health and safety at their workplace.

The bill enhances consultation between employers and employees by facilitating a more direct relationship between them to address health and safety issues. Debate has been adjourned. AAP

## Near Miss for Coal Train Derailment

June 24 2005

Coal supplies to the Dalrymple Bay and Hay Point coal terminals are expected to be delayed for several days after a train derailment in central Queensland's Bowen Basin.

A Queensland Rail spokeswoman said around 45 fully laden wagons and four locomotives came off the tracks around 2am (AEST) at the Coppabella marshalling yards, west of Mackay. She said the coal train "fell into" another stationary train at the yards.

"There is significant track damage and overhead lines and rolling stock damage," she said. "The best estimate we have at this stage is that it will be closed for several days. They are working on getting trains around the site by using other lines."

The train which was derailed was coming from Goonyella Mine. The track is the major route to the Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal - operated by Prime Infrastructure - and Hay Point Coal Terminal owned and operated by the BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance. Nobody was injured in the accident. Queensland Rail investigators were at the site this morning. AAP

## SWAT Hits Dangerous Roadside Work Practices.

24 June 2005

WorkSafe is extending a state-wide campaign to improve the safety of roadside workers and reduce the number of injuries and deaths among them.

The SWAT (Safety for Workers and Traffic) campaign launched late last year proved successful in highlighting the need for safety with over 700 site visits by WorkSafe inspectors across the state.

The new program begins on 1 July and will involve Inspectors looking at all types of roadside workplaces, including those where work is carried out on the road reserve.

As part of the project, a radar speed unit is being trialled at various worksites throughout Victoria.

WorkSafe's Construction & Utilities Program Director, Geoff Thomas said more than 200 notices were issued during the first phase of the campaign requiring employers and workers to change the way they were working to reduce risks.

Continued on page 5

**ADVERTISEMENT**  
**SAFETY AT WORK Magazine**

The June issue of **SAFETY AT WORK** magazine is now available for purchase individually or by subscription at [www.safetyatwork.biz](http://www.safetyatwork.biz)

The current issue contains articles on the following topics and more:

- Columbia Victims' Families Prepare for Next Shuttle Launch
- Peter Sandman on Safety - Part 2
- Smoking "Room" Now Outside Office Buildings
- New Data on Work-Related Sickness
- Australian Unions - OHS, Behavioural Safety Update

It also includes shorter OHS news articles on over 12 countries. For independent safety news from around the world, you can't beat the value of **SAFETY AT WORK** magazine.



# SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

SIA Safety At Work Bulletin  
Issue 8, June 27, 2005 ISSN 1832-6714

Editor Kevin Jones  
Editorial Inquiries +61 (0)3 9478 9484  
jonesk@safetyatwork.biz

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

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

## Disclaimer

Entire contents, Copyright © 2004 – 2005 Workplace Safety Services P/L and its partners unless otherwise stated. All rights reserved. Reproduction, and redistribution, of this publication in any form without prior written permission is forbidden. The information contained herein has been obtained from sources believed to be reliable.

Workplace Safety Services P/L and the Safety Institute of Australia shall have no liability for errors, omissions or inadequacies in the information contained herein or for interpretations thereof. The reader assumes sole responsibility for the selection of these materials to achieve its intended results. The opinions expressed herein are of the authors.

No part of this magazine may be published or copied without permission from the publisher.

This file cannot be forwarded without the formal and written permission of the Safety Institute of Australia and Workplace Safety Services P/L.

Continued from page 4

"There's a lot of room for improvement and we'll be working in partnership with employers and workers to ensure that the right safety measures are in place", Mr Thomas said.

"As we've seen with past tragedies, roadside work can be extremely hazardous, not just because of the work being done, but also with passing traffic which may be travelling faster than the speed limit for the works area. "Our message is don't be surprised if an inspector on their way to visit a factory stops at a site where some unrelated activity like landscaping or tree lopping work is underway.

"This is a shared responsibility between employers and workers who need to have the right safety measures in place for their particular workplace, but also motorists who must observe roadworks speed limits."

Source: WorkSafe Victoria

## Accident-prone Mondays

June 26 2005

Monday is the day you are mostly likely to be injured at work, a report shows.

CGU Insurance has found workplace injuries are 20 per cent more common on Mondays than Fridays.

The research showed that after Monday, the risk of being injured decreased and Friday was the safest working day.

The study revealed:

- The rate of workplace injuries dropped steadily throughout the working week;
- Sprains and strains were the most common workplace injuries;
- The lower back was the most common body part to be injured; and
- Workplace injuries are 20 per cent more common on Mondays compared with Fridays.

Melbourne's CGU Safety and Risk Services spokesperson Kristine Haseldine said Monday was often regarded as the least favourite day, possibly because it was the day when most accidents happened.

"This research suggests that many people find it difficult to make the transition from the relaxation and enjoyment of their weekends to starting the working week," she said.

"Lack of sleep over the weekend and the effects of alcohol and other drugs may be contributing factors to the increased incidence of workplace accidents on Mondays."

Ms Haseldine said many people started new jobs on Mondays and might not be familiar with new work environments.

"And given that the majority of public holidays occur on a Monday, if all things were equal Monday should have actually less workplace injuries than other days of the week, instead the rate is 20 per cent higher," Ms Haseldine said.

Ms Haseldine said workers should identify hazards and put risk controls in place to prevent injuries.

"Employers have a legal obligation to ensure the health and safety of their employees and

they should make sure new employees are aware of hazards involved in the job," she said.

"Immediate induction for employees, especially those using machinery, tools or involved in physical activity, is crucial to workplace safety."

The insurance company based the findings on an assessment of 192,000 workers compensation claims across Australia between 2001 and 2004

AAP

## Health Union Calls For Government Inquiry Into Ambulances

June 26 2005

A leaked report showing that a fleet of ageing country ambulances frequently broke down highlighted the need for a government inquiry into the vehicles' safety, a health union said today.

The Health Services Union today called on the Victorian government to investigate the state's fleet of more than 150 GMC ambulances described as "ticking time bombs".

The call comes after internal papers obtained by a Melbourne newspaper (Eds: Sunday Herald Sun) revealed that 13 Rural Ambulance Victoria (RAV) GMC vehicles experienced mechanical breakdowns and engine failures between December and April.

Health Services Union spokeswoman Terrie Seymour said an assessment of the vehicles was necessary to ensure that the ambulances were safe for paramedics, patients and the community.

"The high level of mechanical failure in these vehicles is not acceptable," she said.

"These ambulances are ticking time bombs."

"The Bracks government cannot just stand by and ignore these problems. They must urgently order an independent inquiry into these shocking failures."

Senior RAV officer Wayne Dyer, who was in charge of health and safety for six months last year, said yesterday that safety issues were systematically covered up, according to the newspaper report.

Mr Dyer said that earlier this year he was ordered by management to hide an independent report on the failure of GMC ambulances from Worksafe.

He said he was forced out of the organisation on stress leave after refusing to deny at a discrimination hearing that a manager told an employee to ignore certain safety issues.

RAV today said Mr Dyer's allegations were being investigated internally.

The organisation's corporate communications manager Paul Bird said ambulance safety was not a problem.

"We reject any allegations that our vehicles are unsafe," he said.

The allegations come weeks before the inquest into the deaths of paramedics Robert Bland, 50, and Phillip Oakley, 33, who were rushing to a car accident when their GMC ambulance careered off a bend and slammed into a tree near Healesville in January on January 2 last year.

AAP