



SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

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 National Office: PO Box 2078, GLADSTONE PARK Victoria 3043
 Website: www.sia.org.au Email: natadmin@vic.sia.org.au

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Landmark agreement to reduce hearing loss in construction industry

20 February 2007

NSW Commerce Minister John Della Bosca today announced a landmark agreement between WorkCover NSW and key players in the construction industry to help reduce noise-induced hearing loss.

“WorkCover NSW, major construction companies, industry groups and unions will establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to implement systems that will improve noise management on construction sites,” the Minister said. “The MOU, which will be in place for 12 months, has been designed to reduce the incidence of noise-induced hearing loss, as well as the social and economic costs of noise related illness in the construction industry.

“The effects of noise-induced hearing loss can include tinnitus, deafness and difficulty with social interaction.

“In 2004/05 there were more than 700 claims for noise-induced hearing loss in the construction industry, which cost the NSW workers compensation scheme more than \$10 million. “This industry accounts for 27 per cent, or nearly a third, of all hearing loss claims but makes up only seven per cent of the overall NSW workforce. “The MOU was developed by WorkCover NSW in consultation with major construction companies, and industry partners,” Mr Della Bosca said.

As part of the agreement:

Companies and their sub-contractors will implement strategies and policies to identify, assess and control processes and equipment which generate high levels of noise.

WorkCover will undertake site audits and distribute educational material.

Manufacturers, suppliers and importers of noise producing plant and equipment will be consulted. They will be encouraged to implement design controls to reduce the output of noise, and educate users about noise levels associated with their machinery.

“The lemma Government will continue to work in partnership with industry to improve workplace safety,” Mr Della Bosca said. “The combined efforts of industry and the lemma Government have seen workplace injuries and fatalities in NSW fall to their lowest levels in 18 years, but with 50,000 people still seriously injured at work each year, there is more to do,” he said.

“All employers and contractors in the construction industry are encouraged to use WorkCover’s Code of practice for noise management and protection of hearing at work as a guide when establishing noise programs,” Mr Della Bosca said. “As a result of the lemma Government’s 20 per cent premium reductions, NSW employers are saving a combined \$560 million in WorkCover premiums this year.”

Source: NSW Commerce Minister

Information Session for potential WorkSafe inspectors

February 23, 2007

WorkSafe has advertised for its annual intake of new inspectors, and an information session is to be held for prospective inspectors.

WorkSafe WA Commissioner Nina Lyhne said today the advertising

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ADVERTISING

A limited amount of advertising has been approved by the Safety Institute of Australia.

If you want to advertise to over 3,000 safety professionals in Australia, please contact Joanne at the SIA Secretariat through natadmin@sia.org.au





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of inspectors' positions always resulted in a good response, and those interested in the positions had the opportunity to get some extra information.

"These positions provide a great opportunity to make a real difference to the occupational safety and health of all Western Australians," Ms Lyhne said. "Inspectors become part of a team of people who share the same commitment and work towards the same objective – preventing workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths.

"There's always a huge response for these positions, so we've planned an information session open to anyone who would like to know more about exactly what is involved in being a WorkSafe inspector.

"The aim of the session is to give a clearer idea of what is required to be an inspector, the role an inspector plays, and the excellent career opportunities available to inspectors. The flexible working arrangements on offer are a big attraction, along with the training and development programs available to inspectors. We're looking for motivated people with relevant industry and occupational safety and health experience in areas like construction, manufacturing, transport and service industries."

WorkSafe encourages both genders to apply for inspectors' positions. Applications for the positions close on March 12, and further details can be obtained on the website at www.jobs.wa.gov.au.

The Information Session will be held at 5.30pm on Tuesday March 6 in the Auditorium at Engineers Australia, 712 Murray Street, West Perth. Those wishing to attend should telephone 08 9225 7730.

"This is a great opportunity for people just beginning their occupational safety and health careers, as well as those who already have a lot of experience. I encourage anyone interested in becoming a WorkSafe inspector to come along to the Information Session and find out more about it," Ms Lyhne said.

Source: DOCEP

How does your staff shape up?

February 22, 2007

Increasingly, research shows that the healthier and happier your staff are, the more productive they'll be. ahm Total Health's latest data based on surveys of over 8000 workers across a range of industries demonstrates just that. This represents the only research of its type in Australia.

So ask yourself, how does your organisation shape up against the rest of Australia? Here's what ahm found:

The impact of stress

- More than 50% say stress impacts their health.
- Where stress impacts "a lot", employees aren't able to work up to their potential an average of 33% of the time. This compares with only 8% for people not affected by stress.
- People who say stress has "some" impact on their health lose productivity nearly 20% of the time, compared to 11% for people who say stress has little impact on their health.

Keeping healthy

- Only 20% of employees get 30 minutes of physical activity on most days (the minimum required to ward off heart disease and diabetes).
- 16% have a body mass index classified as obese.
- 15% are in critical health, while another one quarter has notable risks that impair their ability to work.
- 13% are smokers and 10% drink more than 14 alcoholic drinks per week.
- Almost half (48%) suffer from back pain.

The work environment

- Almost 20% of employees have low job satisfaction and their productivity is reduced more than a quarter of the time.
- Factors such as how comfortable and pleasant you consider your work environment, job flexibility, work-life balance, career opportunities and satisfaction with management all play a role in how productive we are at work.

People in critical health lose the most productivity at work. This is followed by people with low job satisfaction and those who use medication to help them relax. Medical conditions are another major factor, with heart problems topping the list as the medical condition that interrupts productivity most.

Source: Australian Health Management

Reminder on need for RCDs with hand-held electrical tools

February 22, 2007

WorkSafe has issued a reminder to workplaces that residual current devices (RCDs) need to be fitted to electrical circuits wherever hand-held electrical tools are to be used.

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WorkSafe WA Commissioner Nina Lyhne said today that recent incidents investigated by WorkSafe inspectors had prompted the reminder.

“Over the past few months, inspectors have investigated two instances in regional areas of electric shocks, and in both cases RCDs had not been fitted in commercial premises,” Ms Lyhne said. “Sadly, 12 Western Australians have died in work-related incidents involving electricity over the past five years, and this does not show any signs of improving.

“WA’s workplace safety laws require that non-portable RCDs be fitted to electrical circuits where hand-held electrical equipment is used, and building owners, property managers and tenants in commercial buildings all share the responsibility of ensuring they are installed.”

An RCD is designed to immediately switch the electricity off when a leak is detected, providing a high level of personal protection from electric shock to anyone using hand-held electrical equipment. The person in control of the workplace has the choice of installing a fixed RCD at the switchboard to provide blanket protection for the building, or installing RCDs at selected fixed socket outlets where hand-held tools are used. Electrocutation can occur even when electricity is not at high voltage, and electrocutions have been known to happen as a result of contact with faulty electrical equipment that has become live, or via contact with worn and damaged wiring and switches.

RCDs are to be installed only by licensed electrical contractors. The Electrical Contractors Association of WA Inc can provide a list of licensed electrical contractors in local areas.

“The bottom line is that people in control of workplaces need to assess all risks associated with electrical power cords, fittings, machinery and tools,” Ms Lyhne said. “They then need to assess each hazard for the likelihood of injury and develop and implement safe work procedures that minimise the risk of workers being injured, for example installing RCDs.

“There are many different causes of electric shock and electrocution, but they all have one thing in common – they can be prevented. I urge anyone in control of a workplace where hand-held electrical equipment is used to install RCDs where appropriate – it may well save a life.”

Source: DOCEP

Inspection program to look closely at asbestos

February 22, 2007

WorkSafe inspectors will be paying particular attention to asbestos in workplaces during March with an inspection program.

The program will see inspectors who are visiting a workplace for any reason also checking on whether any asbestos present has been identified and the risk to health assessed.

WorkSafe WA Commissioner Nina Lyhne said today that WA’s occupational safety and health laws required that workplaces have specific processes in place if asbestos was present.

“The Regulations require that employers or persons having control of a workplace identify the location of asbestos and assess any risks it poses,” Ms Lyhne said. “Part of that identification process requires that an on-site asbestos register be established, and that is one of the things WorkSafe inspectors will be checking throughout next month.

“If an inspector visits a workplace for any reason, he or she will also run through a pre-prepared checklist with the person in control of the workplace to ensure the identification and risk assessment have been done properly.

“Asbestos can be found in many workplaces, and its uses include asbestos cement sheeting in roofing and walls, the backing on vinyl floor tiles, insulation lagging on boilers and pipe work, gaskets and brake linings in vehicles and thermal insulation on steel beams.”

Inspectors will all use the same checklist in order to ensure a consistent approach, and will then advise the employer if they are not complying with the legal requirements.

The checklist will include:

- Whether the location and type of all asbestos has been identified;
- Whether the risks for all asbestos in the workplace have been assessed;
- Whether an asbestos register is readily available to all staff, contractors and any other person who may be exposed in the workplace; and
- Whether the asbestos register contains all the correct information.

“If inspectors find workplaces that contain asbestos that has not been properly identified, assessed and registered as required, they will issue an improvement notice requiring the workplace to comply with the legal requirements,” Ms Lyhne said.

“Employers who are unsure of their obligations with regard to asbestos in the workplace should obtain a copy of the national Code of Practice for the Management and Control of Asbestos in Workplaces, available through the

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WorkSafe website.

"I encourage employers at any workplace that may contain asbestos to ensure they are complying with their legal obligations, and that they have a copy of the code freely available at the workplace."

Source: DOCEP

WorkSafe Advisory Service extends operating hours

21 February 2007

WorkSafe Victoria is again improving its service and extending the hours of its advisory service for a trial period from 26 February to 25 May.

The advisory service can be contacted on 1800-136-089 and will be open from 7am – 5pm during this period.

WorkSafe's Advisory Service provides information and advice to workers, employers and the Victorian community.

The extended service relates to Occupational Health and Safety (WorkSafe) enquiries during the trial period.

Rehabilitation and compensation advisors will continue to be available at the current times (8.30am – 5pm).

The advisory service will continue to provide detailed 24-hour-a-day recorded information covering the most frequently asked questions relating to rehabilitation and compensation.

Source: WorkSafe Victoria

New grants to improve workplace safety in disability sector

21 February 2007

NSW Minister for Commerce, John Della Bosca, said grants were available from today as part of a new lemma Government assistance package to improve occupational health and safety in the disability services sector.

"The disability sector has some unique challenges that can pose occupational health and safety risks for carers and staff," Mr Della Bosca said. "Under the disability services safety improvement program, small and medium organisations can apply for funding to implement safety improvements to reduce industry specific risks, such as manual handling," he said.

Grants are available in two categories:

- Workplace Improvement Grants – to fund new equipment that eliminates or reduces manual handling risks. Grants will be paid to organisations which purchase new equipment on a dollar-for-dollar basis up to \$5,000.
- Skills Enhancement Grants – to improve access to occupational health and safety training for disability workers. The grant will fund a suite of training options up to \$600 for an individual or \$5,000 for an organisation.

State Manager of National Disability Services (formerly ACROD), Patrick Maher, said the program would enable service providers to meet the needs of their clients safely and sustainably.

"The program compliments Disability Safe, the sector's comprehensive framework to enhance work safety and the quality of services for people with a disability. We look forward to working with WorkCover and the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care to ensure the workplace safety program and other planned initiatives maximise the effectiveness and safety of disability services in the years ahead," Mr Maher said.

Mr Della Bosca said the combined efforts of industry and government had seen workplace injuries and fatalities in NSW fall to their lowest levels in 18 years, but with 50,000 people still injured at work every year, there was more work to do.

"Through continued education, industry consultation and greater risk management we can help to reduce injuries in this sector. This latest initiative follows the announcement earlier this week of a package to help small businesses improve health and safety," Mr Della Bosca said.

"Under the small business package, \$5 million in rebates is available to businesses which install safety equipment in their workplaces," he said. "As a result of the lemma Government's 20 per cent premium reductions, NSW employers are saving a combined \$560 million in WorkCover premiums this year."

Disability sector grant applications close Monday 30 April 2007, with successful organisations to be announced in June.

Organisations can register their interest for the Disability Services Safety Improvement Program or get more information about any WorkCover initiative at www.workcover.nsw.gov.au

Source: WorkCover NSW

Court imposes big fines on printing companies

20 February 2007

Inadequately guarded plant which cost a worker part of his finger has cost two companies \$150,000 in fines.

Hannanprint Victoria Pty Ltd and Eastern Suburbs Newspapers Management (No2) Pty Ltd were each convicted and fined \$75,000 by Judge Barnett in the County Court on Thursday.

The court was told an employee printer lost his right middle finger above the nail in an inadequately guarded printing press on 16 April 2003 at Hannanprint's Noble Park premises.

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Hannanprint owned the plant and stock at the site while Eastern Suburbs Newspapers No.2 employed some 80 printers and printers' assistants.

Each company had duties to its own employees and other people working at the printing plant. Both companies pleaded guilty to one charge laid under the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

The court was told a worker was feeding paper into the press when his finger was caught in the machine. Communications were limited by noise and the inability of the machine's operator to see the man who was injured.

Judge Barnett said it was inevitable that a serious injury would occur due to the unsafe system of work and that the machine was clearly dangerous.

WorkSafe's Executive Director, John Merritt, said outside the court unguarded machines and inadequate procedures were among the easiest workplace health and safety issues to fix.

Source: WorkSafe Victoria

OHS charges hit construction company and water authority

19 February 2007

Working at height without fall protection has cost a Wodonga construction company a conviction and \$10,000 fine even though no one was hurt.

The North East Water Authority was also fined \$5000, without conviction Both pleaded guilty last week to charges laid under the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Wangaratta Magistrates Court was told a WorkSafe inspector saw a Colombera Constructions Pty Ltd employee working without fall protection at the Wangaratta water treatment plant where he could have fallen 5.4m.

WorkSafe told the court North East Water had an ad hoc system in place to supervise construction work being done by Colombera Constructions and that site induction was inadequate.

WorkSafe's Executive Director, John Merritt, said the dangers of working at height were clearly established as was the need to ensure personnel received appropriate site induction. "Falls from height are a major contributor to Victoria's annual death toll, and a hazard that WorkSafe has been working hard to eliminate. While no one was hurt in this case, the potential of a fall from more than five metres could easily have been fatal, left someone a paraplegic or with a permanent head injury."

Source: WorkSafe Victoria

Adobe Acrobat V7.08 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 7.08 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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Editor Kevin Jones
Editorial Inquiries +61 (0)3 9478 9484
jonesk@sia.org.au

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Workplace Safety Services Pty Ltd
849 High Street, Regent VIC 3073 Australia
A.B.N. 68 091 088 621
www.safetyatwork.biz

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