



SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

Proudly Sponsored by the Safety Institute of Australia (Victoria Division)
 National Office: PO Box 2078, GLADSTONE PARK Victoria 3043
 Website: www.sia.org.au Email: natadmin@vic.sia.org.au

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Federal Workers Compensation Changes A Danger For Queensland Employees

March 6 2007

New federal Government workers compensation changes create a complex unwieldy system that tie employers up in red tape and threaten worker safety. Employment and Industrial Relations Minister John Mickel said the changes allow more companies to self insure their workers compensation and to avoid state workplace health and safety laws.

"The Commonwealth Government is allowing some big employers to self-insure under its Comcare scheme, while extending to those employers coverage under the Commonwealth's occupational health and safety legislation," Mr Mickel said. "Under amendments to Commonwealth laws, which come into effect on 15 March, national self-insurers and their workers are specifically excluded from state and territory workplace health and safety laws.

"This decision to regulate occupational health and safety for all national self-insurers will result in more complex, fragmented and confusing safety laws. For example, if a national self-insurer engaged a contractor covered by state laws, the workplace would be subject to two separate regulation systems - including enforcement and levels of penalties for breaches of the legislation. In such a case, the contractor would be stuck with more red tape, as they would have an obligation to conduct certain aspects of its work safely under the Commonwealth laws but also have an obligation under Queensland's laws to provide a safe workplace. "This complexity is not good for Queensland business and it is no good for Queensland workers.

"Of real concern is the potential to create a safety gap. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland employs around 240 highly trained inspectors to provide inspection, advisory and enforcement services to industry and to promote compliance with workplace health and safety laws. Comcare employs around 40 inspectors nationally, which will not be sufficient to provide any meaningful inspection, advisory and enforcement services or compliance audits aimed at preventing workplace injury and disease."

Mr Mickel said that if a many companies moved to self-insurance, greater volatility may arise as Queensland's premium pool decreases. As well, workers generally receive more generous benefits under the state system

"Comcare-covered workers are not covered for journey and recess injuries under a Bill currently before the Senate, and access to Common Law is significantly restricted.

Source: Minister for State Development, Employment and Industrial Relations

Incentives To Make Work/Life Balance A Reality

March 7 2007

Minister for Women Margaret Keach today announced a new Beattie Government 'industry challenge' initiative offering cash incentives for businesses to help workers balance their work and life.

Mrs Keach said most people placed a high priority on balancing their responsibilities as workers and family members.

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10th

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"If we're going to tackle the Queensland skills shortage head-on, we need to look at some of the reasons why people are not re-entering or staying in the workforce - and make some practical long-term changes," she said. "Strategies that help workers balance their work and family life will increase the productivity of Queensland businesses, lower the costs of staff turnover, and let them develop a competitive edge as business operators that retain highly skilled staff."

"We need to break down gender barriers and achieve culture change both in workplaces and in the community."

Mrs Keech said businesses and community organisations would be challenged to develop models, implement pilot programs or establish resources, that could enable employees to work flexibly, improve their skills, or develop leadership abilities.

More information will be available shortly on the Office for Women website at www.women.qld.gov.au

Security guard robbed at gunpoint in work car SYDNEY, March 9 2007

A security guard has been robbed at gunpoint in his work car in Sydney's north, police say.

The security guard was in his work car at traffic lights on Allambie Road at Frenchs Forest at about 12.45am (AEDT) today when a man armed with a pistol entered the passenger side of the car. The armed man threatened the driver and demanded cash, which the guard gave to him.

He then forced the guard to drive to a shopping centre in Frenchs Forest Road East and made him withdraw cash from an ATM, police said.

They returned to the car and drove to Inman Road, Cromer, where the armed man fled on foot. Police, the dog squad and Polair searched the area without success, and the car has been taken for forensic examination.

The culprit is described as caucasian, about 30 years of age, of medium build and about 185cm tall. He was wearing a black hooded jacket and baseball cap, and carrying a green hessian bag and a silver pistol.

AAP

Man dies after NSW industrial accident March 8 2007

A man has died after being crushed between two sheets of metal at a factory in northern NSW. The accident happened at a factory in Ashley, north of Moree, at about 8.15am (AEDT) today, a NSW Ambulance Service spokeswoman said.

The man, aged in his 40s, suffered severe head injuries when he became stuck in industrial equipment that held the sheets of metal.

WorkCover is investigating the incident and has sent an inspector to the factory. A WorkCover spokeswoman said she was unable to provide more details about the incident.

AAP

Victorian scientists exposed to bird flu virus March 7 2007

Two scientists are being monitored after they were exposed to the potentially fatal bird flu virus at a Victorian laboratory. A third scientist at the CSIRO's Australian Animal Health Laboratory at Geelong, west of Melbourne, has been released from quarantine. The staff were exposed to the virus while doing research work at the lab.

Director Dr Martyn Jeggo said the staff had undergone testing and there was no evidence they had been infected with the virus.

The alarm was raised at about 1pm (AEDT) on Monday when a female animal handler donned a special suit without a special air filter. It was discovered two other staff - a female senior technician and a male animal handler - had donned the same suit during the course of the research on infected live ducks. The trio have been given antiviral treatment.

"All have been tested and all tests are negative to date," Dr Jeggo said. "We're dealing with a very, very low risk indeed."

Safety procedures were in place but an investigation was under way to determine what went wrong, Dr Jeggo said. The incident was likely to have been caused by human error, he said. Dr Jeggo said all staff had been spoken to ensure safety procedures were followed, adding the procedures may need reviewing to ensure they were adhered to in future.

There was no evidence the virus transmitted to humans, he said.

AAP

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SIA Members In the News

One of the great needs of any organisation is to establish a profile and to maintain that profile in the public consciousness. It is difficult, sometimes, for not-for-profit organisations, such as the SIA, to achieve this without spending big dollars, often for limited benefit.

The SIA is trying to do this on a range of fronts. Below are some examples of what has happened in the last week or so.

It is the intention of the **SIA SAW BULLETIN** to report to members on any attempts the SIA makes on lifting the institute's profile. But we are equally interested in any appearances by SIA members in the electronic and print media. However we need your assistance in this matter.

If you know of any SIA members mentioned or appearing in the media, please let us know at jonesk@sia.org.au or through the SIA Secretariat at natadmin@sia.org.au and we will pass the information on to members.

ABC TV - Difference of Opinion

Barry Silburn, NSW President, attended the ABC television show "Difference of Opinion" on Monday March 3. The show focused on work/life balance and it was felt that if the SIA could contribute to the discussion, our comments would be worthwhile and provide an OHS context to the debate. As Barry says, "The original issues were hijacked somewhat and the issue of fatigue was not taken on in a great way. If you saw the show you would see that it concentrated upon family issues and training within the workplace." Information and video on the show is available at <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/differenceofopinion/>

The Herald-Sun - 8 March 2007

The Victorian Vice-President, **Kevin Jones** (and editor of this Bulletin) issued a press release on the possible OHS impacts of the implementation of the Federal

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Man dies after being crushed by roller

PERTH, March 7 2007

A Perth man died this morning after being crushed by a 14 tonne multi-tyred roller which ran down an embankment.

The 36-year-old's death on the Albany Highway at Bedforddale took the number of deaths involving mobile plant in Western Australia to 16 in six years.

WorkSafe WA commissioner Nina Lyhne said the high rate of deaths and injuries of mobile plant operators in Australia and New Zealand had prompted a workplace safety campaign.

"On average 880 workers each year in WA are injured seriously enough for them to require time off work," she said. "Mobile plant is an area of significant concern for safety authorities, and it is tragic that a worker has lost his life while this issue is being closely examined".

WorkSafe is examining the death.

AAP

Work begins to clear rubble at mine after rock fall

HOBART, March 6 2007

Work has begun to clear 400 tonnes of rubble left by an underground rock fall at a copper mine in Tasmania's west.

Copper Mines of Tasmania general manager Scot Clyde said the Mt Lyell Copper Mine in Queenstown had been given the go ahead to clear the rubble.

"Inspections by the Tasmanian Mines Inspectorate and the company's geotechnical consultant today confirmed that the rock fall was the result of a localised geological structure," Mr Clyde said. "As a result, we were given clearance by the inspector to commence the clean-up which is now under way."

Mr Clyde said the mine was preparing detailed rehabilitation schedules and ground support designs and he would have a clearer idea tomorrow of how long it would take to return to full operations. There is enough ore in the stockpile above ground to keep the mine's mill operating for seven to nine days.

The rock fall happened about 350 metres underground on Sunday night. Thirteen miners working below the area were safely evacuated just over an hour after the incident.

AAP

Working hours killing families: research

SYDNEY, March 5 2007

Australia's intense work focus is destroying families, research shows.

The research has discovered a strong link between long and unpredictable work hours and the breakdown of family and other relationships, Fairfax newspapers report.

Australia is the only high-income country in the world that combines very long average working hours with large amounts of work at unsocial times -- weeknights and weekends -- and high levels of casual employment.

The fallout from this manner of working is an unhealthy workforce, extremely stressed relationships, angry and inconsistent parents and children with reduced wellbeing, says the report, *An Unexpected Tragedy*, by Relationships Forum Australia.

"These associations are evident when either or both parents work atypical schedules, so the timing of fathers', not just mothers', work matters to children," the report says. "Although low-income members of Australian society are generally more keenly affected by these changes, the impact is shared across all strata in our community."

More than one in five employees work 50 hours or more each week and almost a third regularly work on weekends.

The research draws together a large body of domestic and international research and reveals, when such measures as long work hours and weekend work are combined, Australia is the most work-intense high-income country in the world.

About two million people lose at least six hours of family time to work on Sunday and those hours are not fully compensated during the week.

AAP

ACCI rubbishes report linking long hours to family breakdown

SYDNEY, March 6 2007

A report linking long and anti-social working hours with the breakdown of families is based on false information, Australia's peak business organisation says.

The Relationships Forum Australia report, released today, found long average working hours and night and weekend work had contributed to a large incidence of unhealthy workers, strained personal relationships and poor parenting.

The report, entitled *An Unexpected Tragedy*, said most Australian families suffer time pressure resulting from their work, and spend less quality time with family and friends.

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WorkChoices legislation. The release also took advantage of the topicality of the debate on work/life balance to promote the Safety In Action 2007 conference, and to raise the profile of the SIA.

An article based on the release was published on page 31 of the Herald-Sun on March 8 2007 and is available at <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,21342420-662,00.html>. Kevin has been interviewed on the matter for WORKFORCE newsletter, OHS NEWS and FORKLIFT and the article has generated a response from the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF MINING

John Ninness has featured in an article in the JAN/FEB edition of the AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF MINING. The article reported on his OSHaid program for providing safety advice and assistance to the Chinese government and the Chinese mining industry.



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The decline in family relational health has led to an increased incidence of separation and divorce, the report said.

But Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) chief executive Peter Hendy said data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) showed average annual hours worked by full-time employees had been declining since 1994. The incidence of Australians working 50 or more hours per week had fallen since 2000, he said.

Mr Hendy also disputed the report's claims that Australia is the only high-income country to combine long and anti-social hours with high levels of casual employment. He said the ABS recently revised data to show that Australians' average work hours - 1,724 hours per year in 2005 - were equal to those throughout the developed world.

Casual employment levels had remained stable at mid-1990s levels, he said.

"The fact is Australians are not working longer hours," Mr Hendy said. "Over the whole population, hours worked has fallen, not by much, but to state Australians are working longer hours than ever before is simply incorrect."

Mr Hendy said large mortgages and the lack of affordable child care rather than long hours contributed to stress levels and anxiety within families.

"The financial burden on families is bigger than ever before, child care is a huge issue for families," he said. "Changing hours won't make any difference at all, we need policies to address these issues."

Mr Brough later said it was up to families to decide on their working hours. "Government measures such as the family tax benefit and child care benefit are there to give parents choice, a choice they may otherwise not have about how they balance work and family," Mr Brough said. "It is ultimately a decision for families to make about how much they work. The government is deliberately providing families with choice, rather than dictating to them."

AAP

Rural Press fined \$50,000 over safety breaches

March 10 2007

Media group Rural Press has been fined \$50,000 after a poorly guarded printing machine cost a Victorian man part of his finger. The man's right hand was crushed and the tip of his thumb amputated after his hand caught in a machine while working at the company's Ballarat printing plant west of Melbourne in August, 2005.

Rural Press Printing Victoria was fined \$50,000 in Ballarat Magistrates Court yesterday after pleading guilty to two charges under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The company also was ordered to pay \$1,620 in costs.

WorkSafe Victoria told the court the man was working on a machine that inserts brochures into newspapers when he opened a door to clear loose paper, trapping his hand between a power-driven belt and pulley wheel. The man's hand was crushed, lacerating tendons and fracturing bones. Wires had to be inserted into his hand.

A WorkSafe investigation found there was no proper guarding on the machine's door, no safe working procedures for removing loose paper and risk assessments were not provided with the machine when it was installed several months earlier.

WorkSafe executive director John Merritt said it was concerning that companies with the capacity to ensure machines were guarded failed to do so. "Unguarded machines and inadequate procedures were among the easiest workplace health and safety issues to fix," Mr Merritt said. "Doing it after a death or injury is too late."

The company has since taken steps to make the machine safer, including fitting safety switches to all doors to the machine's danger areas.

Rural Press is the second major Victorian printing company prosecuted in less than a month.

AAP

WorkChoices biggest OHS threat since asbestos

March 8 2007

WorkChoices poses the "biggest threat to the safety of Australian workers since asbestos", according to the body representing Victorian workplace safety professionals.

The Victorian vice-president of the Safety Institute of Australia, Kevin Jones, said it was now "undeniable" that the new federal industrial system had a negative effect on occupational health and safety. The SIA's statement comes in the lead-up to the tenth anniversary Safety In Action conference in May, where the profession will consider emerging threats to workplace safety.

"WorkChoices is opening a Pandora's box of new health problems stemming from stress and high workloads," Mr Jones said. "It's the greatest threat to workers' health since asbestos because it harms people from all walks of life in such an insidious way - millions of Australians will suffer its potentially devastating effects."

Stress-related injuries already make up a growing proportion of the 30,000 or so workers compensation claims filed in Victoria each year, amounting to almost \$134 million according to the Victorian WorkCover Authority.

Stress-related claims are traditionally more complex to manage and, on average, cause the longest absences from work. Roughly double the amount of compensation is paid to workers suffering from stress than those with physical injuries.

"The 'flexibility' WorkChoices boasts means many Australians often don't know from week to week which hours they'll be working and we think it will also translate to longer working weeks. That puts working parents under enormous pressure," Mr Jones said.

"The economic pressures on individuals and family members encourage people to 'cash in' annual leave, which will lead to huge numbers of exhausted, stressed working Australians. Research shows fatigue is a major contributor to workplace incidents and

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fatalities and that injury rates increase if employees don't get enough sleep and rest.

"Australia can no longer afford to ignore the impact of stress at work. Stress-related problems are Europe's second most commonly reported cause of occupational illness, following musculoskeletal complaints – and recent research has shown that job stress is a major factor in musculoskeletal disease.

"We can't give you Australian figures because, as a nation, we've been sweeping the issue of workplace stress under the carpet rather than tackling it head-on as we should."

Mr Jones said commenting on industrial relations policy was an unprecedented step for the Safety Institute of Australia's Victorian division,

"As the voice of OHS professionals, SIA Victoria feels it has a duty to speak up and call attention to the threats that elements of the new industrial relations system pose. And it's not just the workers and their families who will suffer either – employers can expect productivity to fall as a result of rising absenteeism and presenteeism," he said.

The challenges facing workplace safety will be the feature of day one of the three-day Safety In Action Conference, which is hosted by the Safety Institute of Australia's Victorian division and sponsored by WorkSafe Victoria. The conference runs from March 20 to 22 at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre. To register, visit www.safetyinaction.net.au phone (03) 8336 1995 or email joanne@vic.sia.org.au.

Note: Kevin Jones is also the editor of SIA SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

Source: SIA, Victorian Division

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

Breast Cancer Cluster TV Show

Last year, the ABC was forced to close its Queensland studios after a cluster of cancer cases. The Australian Story reports on that saga and provides good follow up on an incident that many of us heard of but most of us heard little more. If you miss the show, information on the program will be available at <http://abc.net.au/austory>

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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www.safetyatwork.biz

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