



DID YOU KNOW?

Thousands of Australians are injured or become ill as a result of their job each year. The failure to protect the health and safety of employees has huge social and economic consequences.

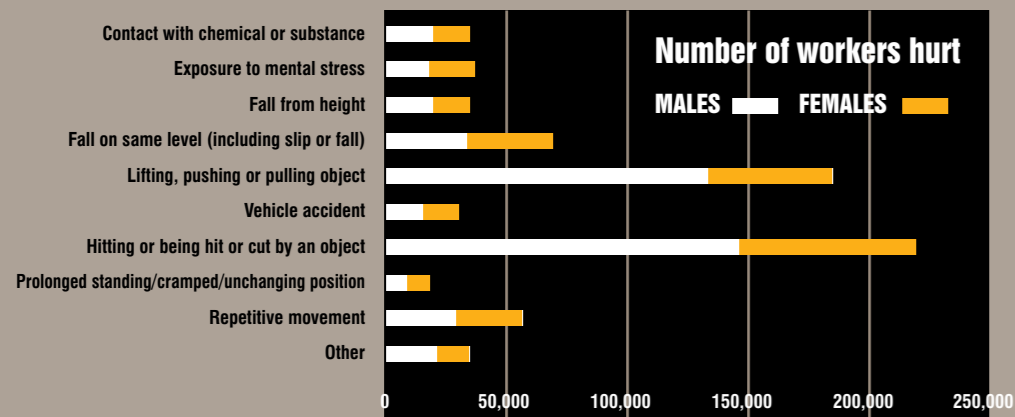
For workers and their families it destroys quality of life, restricts social and family activities, affects relationships and reduces job prospects and earning capacity.

For businesses and the economy, poor health and safety leads to lower productivity through absences from work and higher healthcare costs for the whole community.

It is in all our interests to make sure Australian workplaces have the highest possible standards of health and safety.

Key Facts

- Every year it is estimated that 8,000 Australians die from a work-related injury or illness – more than four times the annual road toll.
- In the next year, around one in every fifteen Australian workers will suffer a work-related injury or disease with 200,000 people affected seriously enough to take five or more days off work.
- Every 2-3 minutes someone will be injured seriously enough to lodge a workers' compensation claim
- The Australian economy suffers to the tune of nearly \$60 billion, or 5.9% of GDP a year. Half this cost is borne by workers and their families and the remaining half by the community, mostly in social security benefits and healthcare.



HEALTH AND SAFETY — WHAT HAVE UNIONS ACHIEVED?

“For over 150 years, Australian workers and unions have campaigned to reduce death, injury and illness at work. Many protections and rights we take for granted were fought for and won by unions. These include workers’ compensation; rest breaks; protective clothing; restrictions on lifting heavy objects; licences and training for heavy equipment; bans on asbestos and dangerous chemicals as well as fair compensation for victims.”

Jeff Lawrence,
ACTU Secretary



WHAT CAN I DO?

FIND OUT MORE contact your union, go to the website below to subscribe to regular email updates, or phone the national workers’ helpline (see number below) for more information.

TALK ABOUT IT talk to your friends, family and co-workers about workplace health and safety. Arrange a meeting at work and ask your union to come.

SHARE YOUR STORY if you have experienced a health and safety incident at work or are worried about losing your rights and protections, you can share your story online.

GET INVOLVED become a health and safety representative or get involved in the Don't Risk Second Rate Safety campaign.

Go to
www.rightsatwork.com.au/ohscampaign
Contact your union or phone
1300 4 UNION

Australian Unions

Working for a better life.



DON'T RISK
2ND RATE SAFETY

EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO GO TO WORK AND COME HOME SAFELY.
BUT THE FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS ARE PROPOSING NEW WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY LAWS THAT COULD PUT YOU AT RISK.

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HOW CAN WE LIFT HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARDS?

We are rightly proud of Australia's excellent road safety record, where our innovative advertising and other campaigns have consistently led the world.

But in workplace health and safety we are a long way from being leaders.

Official figures show that Switzerland has almost half as many work-related deaths as Australia.

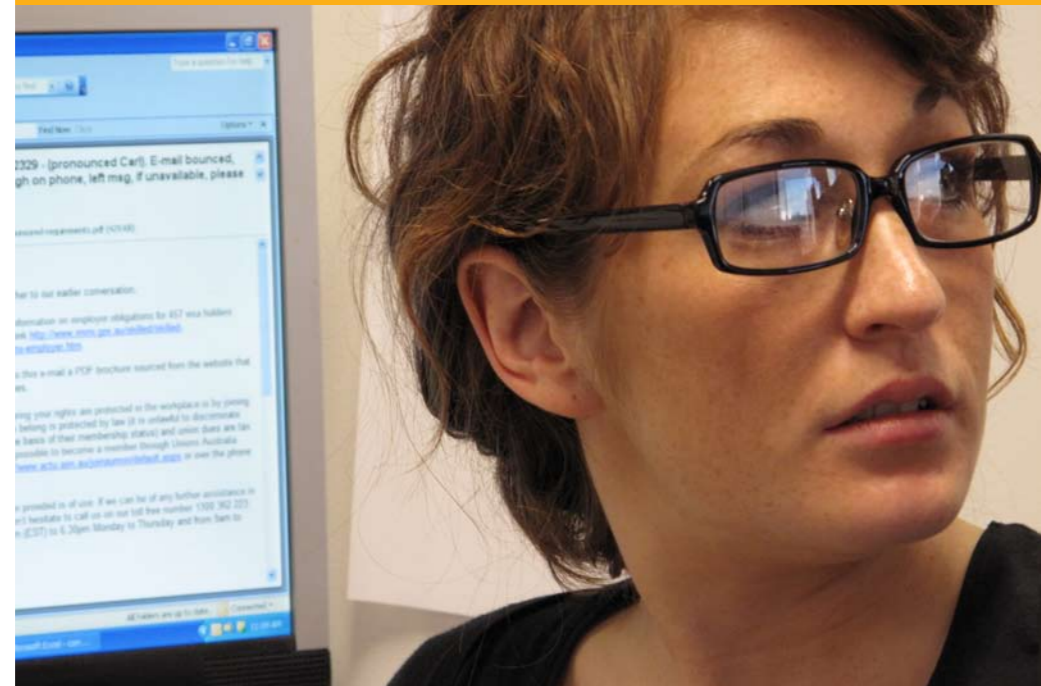
This means that thousands of Australian lives could be saved if we improved the standard of health and safety to world's best practice.

A major opportunity to make work safer

The Australian government is currently proposing to bring in new national Occupational Health and Safety Laws that will apply consistently across all states and territories.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to lift protections for workers by achieving the world's best safety standards for the entire country.

But Australian unions are very concerned that rather than improve safety for all, the new laws will actually undermine standards, putting Australian workers and their families at risk. And that's just not good enough.



“Gary was a wonderful young man who had so much to give and we have been robbed of all that. It’s been 23 years, but I can tell you, it never ends...”

Deanne May, mother of workplace incident victim

Australian Unions

Working for a better life.

UNIONS ARE CALLING ON GOVERNMENT TO ADOPT NATIONAL LAWS THAT:

1

GIVE WORKERS A SAY

Employees should have the right to be consulted by their employer over all work-related matters that affect their health and safety.

It's workers who have the most to lose from being injured or becoming ill. It makes sense that we should have a major say over our own health and safety. New national occupational health and safety (OHS) laws must enshrine the right of workers to do this. Worker involvement via their unions improves health and safety – it's been proven.

2

MAKE EMPLOYERS RESPONSIBLE

There should be an unqualified obligation on employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace and when they breach the law they must prove they did.

Employers have a basic duty to ensure workers' health and safety is protected. They should be legally responsible for maintaining a safe workplace. If something goes wrong, it is logical and fair that employers bear the responsibility to prove they did everything possible to protect their workers. It shouldn't be up to prosecutors to prove that the employer didn't do enough to protect workers. This is what some employers are advocating. National OHS laws must place the burden of proof onto the employer. There should also be tough penalties on employers that breach the laws.

3

EMPOWER HEALTH AND SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES

Workplaces should be able to elect health and safety representatives who, under the laws, have the highest standards of rights, powers and protections to do their job.

The facts show elected health and safety representatives lift OHS standards. It is critical that worker-elected health and safety representatives have the powers and legal protection to keep workers and workplaces safe and healthy. Currently, health and safety representatives have different rights depending on which laws apply in their workplace. New national OHS laws must incorporate the best standards from each system in order to be effective.

4

RESPECT THE ROLE OF UNIONS

It is essential the new laws ensure unions can represent workers effectively and employees can call on their union to immediately inspect suspected safety breaches without notice.

Unions play a crucial role in securing safer, healthier workplaces. Research shows that unionised workplaces in Australia are three times more likely to have an OHS Committee; and are twice as likely to have done an OHS Audit. International studies also confirm that there is better compliance with OHS laws and reduced injuries where there are unionised health and safety representatives. This is because unions train, resource and protect health and safety representatives, enabling them to organise their workplace and deal with OHS issues. The role of a union is also important as there are often not enough government workplace inspectors.

5

ENABLE WORKERS AND UNIONS TO PROSECUTE

When government regulators fail to take action, the right for victims, with their unions, to prosecute an employer for breaching health and safety laws is an important added protection.

Since the 1940s, unions in New South Wales have had the power to prosecute employers in cases where regulators have been unable or unwilling to prosecute; and in the past 15 years unions have achieved a 100% success rate. In each case there have been significant improvements in workplace health and safety. There is no evidence that unions have abused this power. New harmonized national OHS laws need to ensure that this practice continues. It's nothing new – ordinary people can start criminal or civil proceedings in other areas of the law.

“It’s very difficult to get all levels of management to be serious about employee safety. They expect us to maintain a high level of productivity sometimes at the expense of health and safety.”

Steve Thorpe,
Aircraft Maintenance Engineer

“I’ve had years of exposure to client violence including death threats and stalking, with little or no action by the department.”

Ray Wilton,
Family Services Case Manager

