

Your right to privacy

Medical records in Australia are covered by the Privacy Act. In most circumstances every individual has a right to see those records. Your employer does not have these rights.

Your employer has a right to require from you a medical certificate stating:

- If you are fit or unfit.
- If you are unfit, the nature of your limitations, e.g. no heavy lifting, no stair climbing etc.
- How long your condition is likely to continue.

But the choice of doctor is up to you.

Your employer has no right:

- To know the diagnosis of your condition.
- To obtain your detailed medical records from your physician.
- To require you to be examined by the company doctor or company nurse (unless it is related to a workers' compensation claim, then the workers' compensation insurer is able to send you to their doctor for medico legal purposes).

If you want to give your employer any of the information above, you must give informed, written consent: it's up to you. The company cannot, however, require you to provide it.

Introducing Richard to South Australian members

Richard Wormald is the new SA Health and Safety Officer. Richard comes with 30 years of experience in the printing industry. He is a long term member of the union and has been a union delegate, senior delegate (Father of the Chapel) and Health and Safety Representative. Richard has enjoyed the health and safety role so much he studied a Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety at TAFE.

Richard can be contacted at the Adelaide Office or on 0409 651 892.



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WA Workers to be left behind?

West Australian workers will have lesser health and safety protections according to the Western Australian Barnett Government.

The Barnett Government proposals are:

- 1. Maximum penalties** for serious breaches of workplace health and safety laws in WA will be less than those in every other state: in WA, if employers are fined, the fines will be about half the fines charged in other states.
- 2. If someone is killed** at work and WA WorkSafe chooses to not pursue an employer, then that's it, case closed. In other states, the Department of Public Prosecutions will be able to review the case if they think an employer has breached workplace health and safety law. In NSW, unions will have the right to initiate prosecutions in certain circumstances.
- 3. If there is a safety breach** at a worksite, union officials will not be able to gain entry to that workplace without giving 24 hours' notice. In other states, if there is a suspected safety breach, union officials will be able to visit the worksite immediately.
- 4. WA will be the only state** where properly trained Health and Safety Representatives will not be able to direct work to stop when they see a serious and imminent safety problem.
- 5. Protection against discrimination** for raising health and safety issues with your employer will be weaker in WA than in every other state.

Please check out the AMWU website and/or contact your organiser for a copy of the petition to send to the West Australian Parliament.

www.amwu.org.au
BARNETT

Open and place on noticeboard

Vehicle exhaust fumes

There is growing evidence that exposure to traffic related air pollution may contribute to chronic lung disease, especially in asthmatics. It may even cause asthma.

At work, hazardous exposures include:

- Petrol or gas (LPG) fuelled engines which produce up to 10% of carbon monoxide, a poisonous gas.
- Diesel exhaust fumes which increase the risk of lung disease.

Diesel fumes are a mixture of gases, vapours, liquid aerosols and substances made up of particles.

They contain the products of combustion including:

- Carbon (soot)
- Nitrogen
- Water
- Carbon monoxide
- Aldehydes
- Nitrogen dioxide
- Sulphur dioxide
- Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

Most of the contaminants are absorbed into the soot. The content of the carbon particle or soot varies depending on the fuel used and the type of engine. Petrol engines produce more carbon monoxide but much less soot than diesel engines.

Composition of diesel fumes

The quantity and composition of diesel fumes may vary depending on:

- The quality of diesel fuel used
- The type of engine, e.g. standard, turbo or injector

- The state of engine tuning
- The fuel pump setting
- The workload demand on the engine
- The engine temperature
- Whether the engine has been regularly maintained.

Health effects of diesel fumes

Exposure to the diesel fumes can cause irritation of the eyes or the respiratory tract. These effects are generally short term. Exposure to fumes is likely to affect asthmatics more than those without asthma. Prolonged exposure to diesel fumes, in particular to any blue or black smoke, can lead to coughing, chestiness and breathlessness.

In 2012, the International Agency for Research on Cancer listed diesel exhaust fumes as a known human carcinogen i.e. diesel fumes cause lung cancer in humans. Exposure to petrol engine exhaust emissions does not have the same risk.

Skin contact with cold diesel fuel may cause dermatitis.

Where there is smoke....

As smoke is the product of combustion, its colour can be an indicator that action needs to be taken.

- Blue smoke (mainly oil and unburnt fuel) indicates a poorly serviced and/or tuned engine.
- Black smoke (soot, oil and unburnt fuel) indicates a mechanical fault with the engine.
- White smoke (water droplets and unburnt fuel) is produced when the engine is started from cold and disappears when the engine warms up. With older engines, the white smoke produced has a sharp smell which may cause irritation to the nose and throat.

Preventing exposure

Any internal combustion engine, i.e. petrol, diesel or LPG, must never be used in an enclosed space. It is best not to use these engines in any indoors environment. Diesel engines produce the most hazardous of vehicle emissions, but LPG engines can produce dangerous levels of carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide is a deadly, colourless and odourless gas: for example, a 1.8 LPG engine operating in a workplace of 10 metres x 60 metres x 100 metres could just take 30 minutes to get above the standard for carbon monoxide.

Where exposure cannot be prevented, consider the use of a combination of specific control measures including:

- The use of electric powered vehicles in warehouses etc.
- Keeping the workplace well ventilated; at least 10 air changes per hour
- Wiring the extraction fans with the lighting circuit
- For static running of engines, installing tailpipe exhaust scavenge systems that are hard to damage; crushed ducts do not work
- The use of filters attached to tailpipes
- Catalytic converters.

More general control measures such as:

- Starting up diesel fuelled vehicles outside
- Turning off engines when not required
- Keeping doors and windows open where practicable
- Installing air vents in the walls and ceiling
- Job rotation
- Wearing suitable gloves when handling hot and cold diesel fuel.

The presence of soot on the walls or on other surfaces is a useful indicator that engine fumes are not being adequately controlled.

Maintenance, examination and testing

Watch out for dark smoke from diesel engines or unusual acrid smells from LPG fuelled engines. These engines need immediate maintenance.

Static running, e.g. vehicle testing

- Every day, look for signs of damage to the scavenge ducts.
- At least once a week, check that the scavenging system works properly.
- To know if the scavenging system is working properly you need to know the extraction design performance. The equipment supplier's manual should give this information.
- Get a competent ventilation engineer to examine the system thoroughly and test its performance at least once every 14 months.

Moving vehicles, e.g. warehouses

- At least once a week, check visually that the fan and roof vents are clearing the fumes properly. Look for signs of damage to the fan and dirt build up on the blades.
- Get a competent ventilation engineer to examine the system thoroughly and test its performance regularly.
- Test LPG fuelled engines for carbon monoxide emissions regularly.

This information is taken from guidance issued by the UK Health and Safety Executive.

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