



Paul Bastian, AMWU National Secretary

SNOWMEN GET A LIFT FROM MT BULLER DEAL

A MWU members working at Mt Buller snowfield have iced a deal which will help keep the busy slopes safe for coming snow seasons.

The 11 mechanics and fitters who keep the mountain's 22 ski lifts running safely and efficiently have a new agreement making it easier on their pockets to afford the personal snow gear essential when heading out to do their jobs in sub-zero temperatures.

They work in conditions ranging from crisp sunny mornings to near-blizzards, climbing lift towers up to 20 metres high while wielding icepicks to free-up frozen cables and wheel mechanisms.

"When you're up the top of a lift tower in a harness dealing with ice, snow and winds early on a winter morning it creates challenges, but we're trained for it and safety's top priority," AMWU delegate Mark Angliss said.

Just after dawn they also have all the main chairlift motors de-iced and warmed up, from the big Ebon 6-seater to smaller 2-seat T-bars.

All day they are on radio call-out from their workshop for any lift stoppages, with a seven-minute target for re-start to ensure no one can ever be marooned up in a chair in freezing conditions.

Our AMWU all-weather warriors at Victoria's busiest alpine resort joined with electricians to unanimously support a three-year deal delivering pay rises of 2.5 per cent.

It includes a new allowance that will enable members to easily afford the important winter-spring ski gear – skis, goggles and sunglasses – that is essential to working in a bitterly cold environment.



Set to go: Some of the proud union maintenance crew on Mt Buller. L:R Chris 'Zip' Zippel, Paul Meyer, Ewey Macaskill, Darren Loughridge, Mark Angliss, Tony Pickering.

"As an extra, we got the company to agree to us keeping the gear we've been issued with for this winter, at no charge," Mr Angliss said.

The EBA allows for the fitters and mechanics to work long winter days during the peak ski season, with weekly hours over 47.5 returned as time owing or pay including superannuation.

The members stuck together to successfully head off a company bid to cap hours claimable as time owing.

In summer, they work a set 38-hour, four day week for the crucial overhauling of lift equipment.

Most live in nearby towns including Mansfield. When travel time up the mountain is included, work days can stretch to 14 hours.

"We're responsible for maintaining all the lift equipment, and the 10 gensets (diesel generator sets) as back-up power for the resort's buildings if the electricity fails," Mr Angliss said.

"Most of the guys are pretty committed to this job and the mountain – we're all skiers, all our



Freezing: Adult apprentice fitter Dan Roberts climbs a tower, ice axe in his belt.

families ski and some partners work up here too. I've been up here 26 years." AMWU organiser Dave Corben noted that deal was recognition of the critical work that our members do. Mr Angliss agreed.

"Winter is when it's all happening, we can have 10,000 visitors on weekends so everything has to work properly every day," he said. "The company knows the ramifications of someone getting stuck up on a ski lift at minus three degrees." ■

COMPO WIN BRINGS PROMPT CARE FOR INJURIES

The AMWU has won a substantial victory in NSW which means that from August 1 injured workers needing prompt, specialised medical attention no longer need pre-approval from their employers' insurance company to access it.

Samuel Bushby knows first-hand what a difference the changes will make.

Last year the former pipefitter at shipbuilder Forgacs was forced to wait over 12 weeks without any income before surgeons operated on his crushed elbow nerves, which part-froze his lower arms and hands.

Mr Bushby's strain injuries came on gradually but once incapacitated, he could barely support his family financially. Physically, he couldn't lift his toddler son or cradle his newborn daughter.

"I'm re-training for a new job in security, but I was set back for months because the insurance company wouldn't believe me and disagreed with my own doctor. I'd be working by now," the AMWU member said.

The new guidelines cover many services including treatment in the first 48 hours after injury,

medical specialists within the first three months, plus ultra-sounds, X-rays, medicines and services of physiotherapists, osteopaths, chiropractors.

It also includes expenses such as travel. Find a detailed summary here: amwu.org.au/workcompsnw.

"I'm happy for those workers who now will be able to get specialist help soon after they're injured, not get treated like a number rather than a person," Mr Bushby said.

The AMWU and CFMEU made the breakthrough in talks with the NSW State Insurance Regulatory Authority earlier in 2016 after relentless campaigning for four years.

AMWU NSW Secretary, Tim Ayres, said early specialist treatment would minimise complications and give injured workers the best chance of getting back to work.

"This has come as a result of sustained pressure for change by the AMWU," he said.

"Having lost the opportunity for early specialist treatment in 2012 as part of the cruel NSW Government workers



Hope for others: Samuel Bushby with his son Fletcher, 2, and baby daughter Charlotte.

comp changes, it meant some workers were never able to return to their pre-injury employment and in some cases lost their livelihood."

Mr Ayres said until August 1 insurers' admin officers commonly took the full three weeks allowed before making a decision. A "no" often meant months or even years of litigation.

"The scheme has a long way to go before it can be considered fair, but all of this underlines the importance of workers having their own GP assess their injuries and not see a company doctor unless they have first sought advice from the union," he said. ■

AMWU TO ALERT MINISTER ON WEAKENED ASBESTOS CHECKS

The AMWU has warned against weakening Victoria's asbestos protections after reports that WorkSafe is considering excluding work on buildings constructed after 2003 from mandatory checking for the deadly substance

The proposed change in a draft set of new WorkSafe regulations has been quietly pushed by property developers and backed by the Housing Industry Association, according to a report in Fairfax media.

AMWU Victorian State Secretary Steve Dargavel said it would be among issues he would be taking up next week when

he meets the minister for WorkSafe, Robin Scott.

"Asbestos keeps being discovered in imported building materials on new construction projects, so it would be outrageous if WorkSafe considered winding back compulsory asbestos checks for any work on buildings put up after 2003," Mr Dargavel said.

"If anything, we need WorkSafe being far more proactive because Border Force are failing to properly check imports. We've identified numerous instances where imported parts containing asbestos are being used in machinery which manufacturing workers are expected to maintain."

The WorkSafe proposal reported by Fairfax media would free builders from the existing requirement to audit for asbestos when refurbishing or demolishing structures built after December 2003, the year the deadly substance was banned from import or use.

Last month the discovery of asbestos tiles and building materials from China by supplier Yuanda caused major disruption to building projects in Brisbane and Perth. Unions had not been told by WorkSafe

Victoria during the past two years of detailed discussions on updating safety regulations that any rules governing asbestos were subject to change.

Mr Dargavel said the weakening of Australian protections was a flow-on from free trade agreements like that with China, which increased imports of materials where we could not verify the authenticity of Material Safety Data Sheets.

"I think we'll see employers increasingly seeking to weaken Australian protections in the name of free trade agreements so they can cut costs, whether it be importing unsafe steel or relaxing checks on asbestos," he said.

Asbestos Diseases Foundation president Barry Robson called on the Victorian Government to overrule WorkSafe bureaucrats on anything which risked Victorian workers becoming part of a fourth wave of victims of asbestosis and mesothelioma.

"This is a classic case of an industry going through the back door to directly lobby bureaucrats, behind the back of politicians," Mr Robson said. ■