

'It's no accident' is the OHS newsletter of the AMWU. Feedback and story ideas to amwu@amwu.asn.au

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VICTORIAN CORONER URGES USE OF HIGHER ORDER OF CONTROLS

The Victorian Coroner, Audrey Jamieson has urged employers to look beyond administrative risk control measures such as training and safe work instructions. She said these were the least effective forms of risk control. Jamieson was investigating the death of a worker in March 2008.

Coroner Jamieson said the worker's death highlighted the importance of having systems that prevented people working alone, ensured risk assessments considered tasks outside normal machine operation, and ensured risk control measures didn't "rely solely on administrative controls".

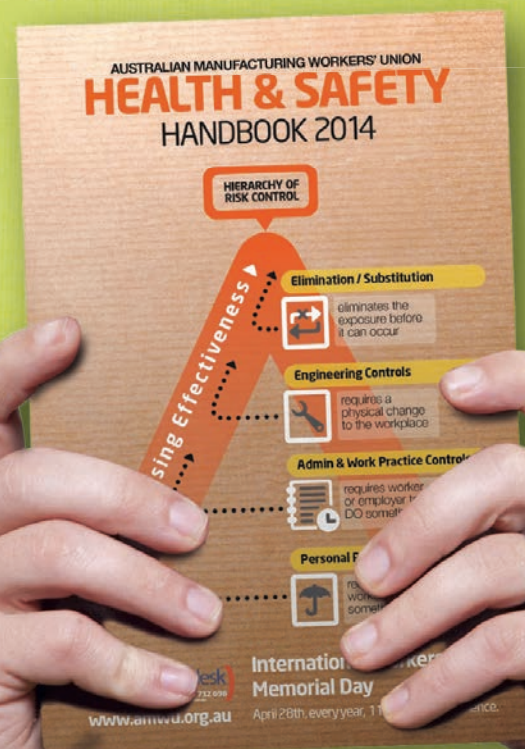
See hierarchy of control, page 14 of 2014 Health and Safety Booklet.

GRAB YOUR HANDBOOK

The new edition of our Health and Safety Handbook has been mailed and every Health and Safety Rep across the country should have one.

If you didn't get your copy, check with your organiser, delegate or branch office to make sure we have you listed as a Health and Safety Representative.

GET MORE USEFUL INFO AT: www.amwu.org.au/campaigns/12/ohs/



IT'S NO ACCIDENT

HEALTH AND SAFETY NEWS

AUGUST 2014

COALITION GOVERNMENTS ARE WINDING BACK THE CLOCK

Our Health and Safety Reps (HSR) face a new threat from the Abbott Government and its state allies.

As part of the conservative anti-union agenda, the Coalition Governments are wanting to:

- Limit the rights of HSRs to issue cease works
- Restrict a HSR's right to assistance from a union official
- Restrict union officials access to sites when investigating alleged health and safety breaches
- Remove from regulations the requirement for hearing tests
- Lower the requirements for asbestos removalists
- Limit the advice in Codes of Practice.

Some of these changes have already been adopted by the Queensland LNP Government in May 2014.

Last month the AMWU issued an appeal for your stories to put to a government inquiry.

Your words were powerful and moving.

Inside is just a sample of the letters you wrote.



PLEASE PLACE ON NOTICEBOARD

Here is a sample of your letters describing how AMWU HSRs have improved health and safety

IT ONLY TOOK 30 MINUTES:

“We still have asbestos in the workplace but due to my and other HSR’s involvement, we have an asbestos plan which has involved removing some parts from the site, as well as covering other areas with corrugated sheets and outlines future action steps as finances permit. At one point during this process I personally directed a cease work request to personnel working beneath a hole which had been made in the asbestos roof that day and no remedy had been put in place for a few hours. Once I contacted the site manager, he agreed it was unsafe and that’s when work was stopped while we remedied the hazard and it only took about 30 minutes.”

AGAIN, HSRs NEEDED TO GET ACTION:

“A lot of issues are addressed but would not be looked at without the input from safety reps. For example: Insufficient lighting for workers working in the chiller tunnel. Company fitted more lighting the next day. Soft care hand soap was too watery. Company instructed suppliers to the correct mix. Zebra crossings had no lights on them for night shift workers. Company will install lights as required. Safe handling procedures for new chemicals being used by cleaners. Company will retrain cleaners in correct procedures.”

IT TAKES HSR TO GET ACTION:

“I was approached by an employee who was concerned about the forklift that did not brake suddenly but took a certain distance to stop. I told the forklift driver not to drive that forklift and put on the out of service tag. Then I informed the manager and in two days the forklift was removed from site. It had been brought to the manager’s attention by workers and nothing had been done until the HSR got involved.”

CONSULTATION AND RESPECT:

“I also firmly believe that a safe workplace is also more productive and a couple of achievements that have occurred here through such negotiations is that now all mechanical personnel are qualified dogmen and the equipment and processes that we as a group developed have not only reduced injuries but have improved production change overs and reduced downtime. We have also developed equipment and processes on all our production lines - all have resulted in product and cost improvements. This did not happen here until the employer knew that they had to negotiate in good faith with someone who was prepared to act using the law and regulations. Previously equipment was acquired without consultation which resulted in injuries.”

SOLVING MANUAL HANDLING HAZARDS:

Staff carrying computers: “Across a square mile site by hand or pushing an old steel trolley was causing back issues – I raised the issue as an OHS delegate in IT and arranged a small electric truck which is still in use today (zero back injuries since). Up and down wide stairways with no way of holding the railing for balance – I had safety concerns for IT staff and all staff coming up the stairs. Raised issue as OHS Rep and the company is now installing a \$100K goods lift.”

USING PROVISIONAL IMPROVEMENT NOTICES:

“There was a risk assessment conducted in my work area. There was a fall from heights issue which was judged an extreme risk. We asked for a work stand to be built. They said they would have a stand made. Then we found that it was delayed and received feedback that they were reluctant to buy it. I issued a PIN, again the Company disputed it. The Inspector came in and my PIN was converted to an Improvement Notice. Meanwhile the Company contracted out for a work stand to be built, which was inadequate and dangerous to use as it fell over. I got the Inspector back and he pursued the company to resolve the issue.”

NSW INJURED WORKERS DAY

In June 2014, the Injured Workers Support Network and Unions NSW launched a report on the devastating effects the NSW Liberal Government changes made to workers compensation in 2012.

A Report by Macquarie University Centre for Workforce Futures summarised the effects of the changes as –

“..... vulnerable individuals who were already suffering the effects of work injury or illness are now experiencing increased trauma, distress, depression,

financial hardship and unnecessarily prolonged and exacerbated pain when their treatments are delayed...

This study has found that the costs of injuries are increasingly shifting from the workers’ compensation scheme to the workers and their families. The financial burden of workplace injuries also transfers to federal tax-payer funded safety nets such as Medicare and Centrelink benefits.”

Campaigning by the Workers Health Centre, the Injured Worker Support Network and unions has forced the NSW Liberal Government to announce a

few changes last month. The AMWU is encouraged by some these changes but there are still a long way to go. Dave Henry NSW H&S officer said, “The government has knocked off the very hard edges but many injustices still exist for injured workers”.

Comcare: As we go to press it looks as if the Federal Government may have similar changes in the wings for workers covered by Comcare. The Federal parliament has before it legislation which will expand Comcare coverage to more private industry self insurers. There are plans for further changes later in 2014 but the government is being very tight lipped about what the changes will be. The Self Insurers Association opposes the level of benefits currently paid to workers under Comcare and have indicated a strong preference for a “less generous” scheme.

UNITING WORKERS TO GET CHANGE

Work that was previously ok was recently made hazardous by redundancies at parts manufacturer. Before redundancies, 10 people rotated through the hazardous jobs which allowed at least one day in between for their bodies to recover. But with redundancies the number of people decreased and people were working three to four days a week without a break from the hazardous work. People started having to take time off work to recover. After hearing peoples concerns, the company agreed

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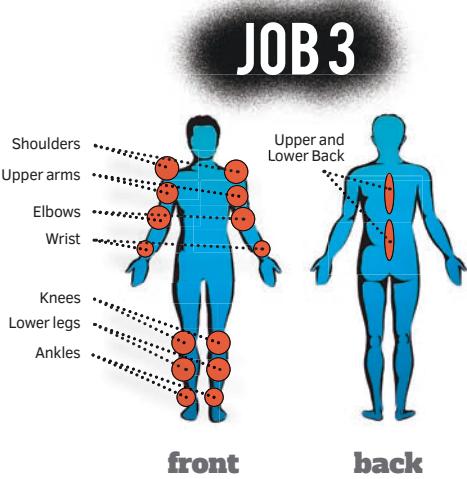
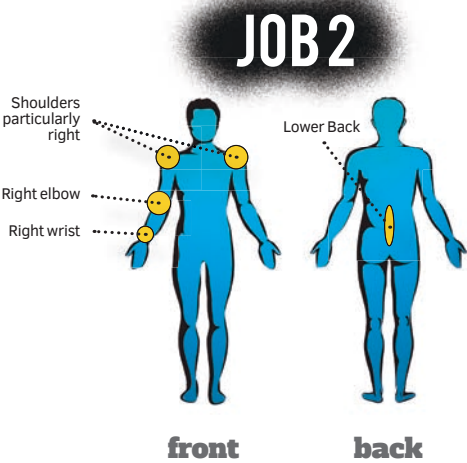
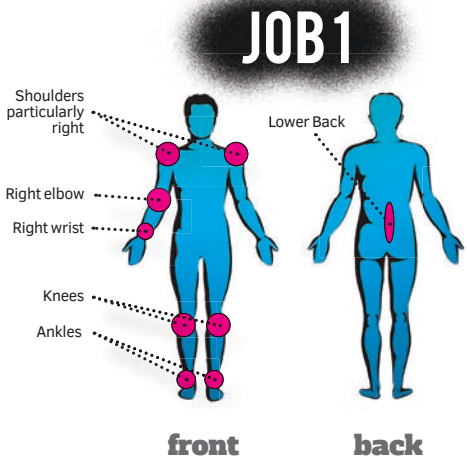
Body mapping is a technique where workers, anonymously, mark on a “body map” where they are hurting.

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to train up some other workers. The training started but then stopped.... work demands took over. The HSR had attended AMWU HSR training so he knew it was important to present a united front. He had to convince management that this was a genuine issue. Body mapping is a technique were workers, anonymously, mark on “body map” where they are hurting. The HSR and his co workers did this for all their tasks. They also made sure injured workers had medical evidence and everyone all signed a letter requesting change.

And it worked: the petition, the doctors’ certificates and the body mapping had the desired effect: the training has happened and job rotation provides the needed breaks.

See Body Mapping page 20, 2014 Health & Safety Booklet.



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