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

HSRs KICKING GOALS FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY

Confined spaces are dangerous

The support of a union delegate was essential when a HSR challenged management's decision that the spaces in which members were working were not confined spaces. Shipbuilding means workers enter restricted spaces that are *not designed or intended primarily to be occupied by a person*. Confined spaces can be lethal. The HSR questions were ignored by supervisors and management called in government H&S inspectors. After lots of push back from management the spaces are now properly classified and of course, safety measures improved. Confined Spaces Regulations require employers to have emergency plans, including rescue procedures and continuous communication with a worker from outside the confined space.

Even the threat of a Provisional Improvement Notice gets action

After a recent HSR training course, a newly trained HSR went back to his workplace, a large can-making facility in Brisbane. For over 12 months concerns about an unstable can line had been raised with management – the supporting framework was rusted and in some places not securely attached to the floor. The floor was degraded due to the necessary cleaning activities. It only took a threat of a PIN and the company engaged structural engineers to examine and make recommendations on how to make the line safe and stable. Union training gave this HSR the confidence to effectively represent their workgroup and achieve improvements for all.

Cease work makes management listen and act

Isocyanates are often used in spray painting, especially in car repair and manufacturing. Exposure to isocyanates can lead to asthma which for some people never goes away.

A HSR had raised concerns with management about the spray booths, but when a member was diagnosed with health problems associated with exposures to isocyanates, the HSR decided he had had enough of talking, it was time to act. The HSR spoke to management again and issued a cease work. This time management acted – independent air testing was done and a report written. Management accepted the recommendations and the booths are now performing well.

Authorised by Paul Bastian, AMWU National Secretary.
 Made in Australia by AMWU Members. 1/14

AMWU PROTECTION
 1300 732 698
 www.amwu.org.au

IT'S NO ACCIDENT AMWU H&S NEWS

Summer 2014

Made in Australia by AMWU members

HOTTER TIMES

High seasonal heat causes health and safety problems and this is not limited to the cooler parts of Australia, as last summer showed, extreme heat days occur right across the country.

For people working indoors and outdoors, hot days affect our ability to think clearly, reduce our concentration and increase fatigue. All this leads to more mistakes or accidents and workers running the risk of heat rashes, extremely painful heat cramps and the more serious heat exhaustion and potentially fatal heat stroke.

In the summer months all workplaces should be planning ahead and monitoring weather forecasts. Planning ahead can include rescheduling work to cooler parts of the day or rescheduling hot or heavy work to another day or time of the day.

Working outside in the direct sun or inside where there are heat sources, eg. machinery, furnaces and boilers are particularly risky.

There should be constant monitoring of the temperature where people are working.

Welders and Health and Safety Reps:
 Are you checking Safety Data Sheets?

BULLETIN
 www.amwu.org.au

Open and place on
 noticeboard

HOTTER TIMES

Working in heat is often made worse by the safety gear that workers have to wear. Although we tend to think older workers are more susceptible to heat, so are younger workers. We all need to have more rests and do less physically, heavy work.

It's important that workers are trained on how to recognise the symptoms in themselves and their workmates – and report it immediately.

Rest breaks should be introduced and modified to suit local conditions and meet individual requirements.

The AMWU encourages members to negotiate agreements. The aim should be to achieve prior agreement on procedures to apply when temperatures rise rather than to rely on stop-gap measures and spontaneous actions.

Remember: As there is no legislated temperature at which work must cease, workplaces need agreed policies to deal with seasonal heat. The employer has a duty of care to “ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all the workers.”

The AMWU recommends workplaces allow for paid rest breaks in an air-conditioned/cooled area when the temperature, measured by a dry bulb thermometer, reaches the following temperatures:

30 to 32 degrees celsius	10 minutes rest every hour
32 to 35 degrees celsius	15 minutes rest every hour
35 to 38 degrees celsius	30 minutes rest every hour
Over 38 degrees celsius	Rest in a ventilated area until less than 38 degrees celsius or go home

PROTECTION FROM THE SUN

Of course, on hotter days the UV radiation from the sun increases. It is estimated that some 34,000 non melanoma skin cancers a year might be caused by work exposures – and that about 13% of all these cancers are in men and 4% in women. So it's essential that workers are protected from

the direct sun and if that's unavoidable, skin and eye protection measures are necessary.

THIRSTY TIP - Thirst is not a reliable guide for dehydration. It's essential to drink especially when working or exercising in the heat. Drink water, not energy or sports drinks. Urine that is light yellow is a good indication that you're getting enough fluid.

TIG WELDING

Thoriated tungsten electrodes are widely used as they make long-lasting, good welds, are able to be sharpened and are quite easy to use. But beware - they contain thorium, a low level radioactive material. The danger of generating particulates happens when grinding to reshape the electrodes. The contaminated dust can be swallowed, eg. dust on skin, clothes, hands etc.

This advice found in a Safety Data Sheet is essential reading:

Grinding wheels for reshaping thoriated electrode tips should be dedicated to that purpose and exhaust and collection points sited as close as possible to the point of generation of particulate matter. The material is very dense and does not readily disperse in air. Build-up of grinding waste should not be permitted.

The label and Safety Data Sheet for thoriated tungsten electrodes should contain the following warning: R45(1) may cause cancer.

Of course the best solution is to use alternatives to thoriated tungsten – Lanthanated or ceriated tungsten. Everyone needs to ask "Do we really need to use thoriated tungsten?"

If no alternatives are available:

- Use local exhaust ventilation [LEV] with a high efficient dust collection system when sharpening/grinding. Remember LEV must be regularly maintained.
- Wear positive pressure air fed welding shields.
- Clean up regularly.
- Always wash hands with soap and water after handling to avoid ingestion of dust.

HSRs KICKING GOALS FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY

Our laws are very clear that the function of a Health and Safety Representative (HSR) is to represent the interests of workers in health and safety matters.

According to the Work Health and Safety Act -The powers and functions of a Health and Safety Representative for a workgroup are -(a) to represent the workers in the workgroup in matters relating to work health and safety

When deciding on how many HSRs to elect, it is important to:

- Arrange workgroups so that the interests of workers are effectively and conveniently represented.
- Make sure that the HSR is readily accessible to each worker in the workgroup.

Who and how many workers are in a workgroup is up to negotiation between the workers and the employer/PCBU. We can always expect that companies will push back or try and limit the number of elected HSRs, but our task is to build a good case to demonstrate that each workgroup is needed.

For useful forms for workgroup negotiations and election of HSRs see:

- AMWU 2013 Health and Safety Handbook, pages 32 to 37
- AMWU Delegates Handbook, pages 147 to 153
- http://www.amwu.org.au/content/upload/files/campaigns/OHS/HSR_Election_templates.pdf

Active HSRs do make a difference in our workplaces. See the back page for a few examples to inspire you for the start of 2014.

* **Work Health and Safety Section 68** ACT, Comcare, Qld, NSW, NT, SA and Tassie.

Victoria OHS Act Section 58 Powers of Health and Safety Representatives

Western Australia OHS Act Section 33 Function of safety and health representative: liaise with the employees regarding matters concerning the safety or health of persons in the workplace



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