

**'It's No Accident' is the WHS newsletter of the AMWU. Feedback and story ideas to [amwu@amwu.org.au](mailto:amwu@amwu.org.au)**

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## Support



**AMWU Care**  
A counselling service for members and their families **1800 206 316**

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# Critical win for welding health and safety

**Many in the trade can still recall a time when welders didn't get much of a retirement as the long-term effects of welding fumes took a toll later in their lives.**

Despite welding fumes being reclassified as a Group 1 carcinogen, Safe Work Australia (SWA) was still considering a proposal to abolish the workplace exposure standard (WES) that sets the upper limit of exposure to welding fumes.

That proposal was roundly criticised by AMWU members who swiftly made their voices heard.

Activists let SWA members know through online action that they were not going to put up with being left exposed by a decision made in the boardroom.

The proposal was voted down resulting in a critical win for union health and safety.

"There is no research or justification to abolish the workplace exposure standard for welding fumes," AMWU President Andrew Dettmer said when he represented union members at SWA.

"Australia's exposure standard actually lags behind many other countries. We want to see it strengthened."

**"Australia's exposure standard actually lags behind many other countries. We want to see it strengthened."**



Wes Hodgens, a boilermaker welder who completed his apprenticeship more than 20 years ago, agreed.

"Looking after people's health should be the number one priority. The industry is not without its risks but if there are things we can change to make it safer, they should be changed."

When Mark Pearce began his career in welding at a large union worksite in the 80s, he says they were "very proactive about extraction and getting welding fumes out of the air; I think they were years ahead of their time and they probably saved hundreds of lives."

Workers have long been at the forefront of work health and safety, and following the win to retain the WES, both Wes and Mark want to see more done to ensure those in workplaces where welding occurs are as safe as possible.

The current WES for welding fumes in Australia was set in 1995 at a limit of 5 mg/m<sup>3</sup>. In Germany and the Netherlands, the limits are 1.25 mg/m<sup>3</sup> and 1 mg/m<sup>3</sup> respectively. ●

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AMWU Health and Safety News



AMWU

November 2021

## Inclement Weather

### What is inclement weather?

When we talk about inclement weather, we're talking about weather that can pose a risk to the health and safety of a worker. It can mean abnormal or hazardous weather which could include rain, lightning, hail, humidity, snow, cold temperatures, ultraviolet radiation, wind, smoke, dust, and heat.

Most of the time we can predict inclement weather in Australia.

### What does your employer need to do?

A person conducting business or undertaking (PCBU) must ensure, in consultation with workers and HSRs, that they do the following.

**Conduct risk assessments of all tasks/jobs which may be impacted by inclement weather (like jobs outdoors or in non-airconditioned work environments).**

Risk assessments must consider the attributes of the workers who do the job, including whether those workers have been acclimatised to the environmental conditions, their age or fitness, their pregnancy or breastfeeding status, and the amount and type of clothing worn.

Risk assessments must also consider matters such as the tasks/jobs being carried out by workers in the work environment including the level of manual effort required or their vicinity to plant which may exacerbate their exposure to inclement weather conditions and for how long they are exposed.

Implement controls which will protect workers from risks which may arise from inclement weather.

The hierarchy of controls must be applied in circumstances when considering appropriate controls for the working environment. Elimination will be beyond the control of the employer in most cases. However, substitution, isolation, and engineering controls may be available. Failing this, administrative controls and PPE may need to be relied upon.

**Provide adequate facilities to protect workers from any risk of harm arising from inclement weather.**

Employers must monitor the conditions of the work environment, including facilities, to ensure the health and safety of workers. The conditions of the workplace should be monitored on a regular basis, particularly when there are changes to the type of work being done or forecasts of inclement weather. Facilities must be available and they must be clean, safe, accessible, and in good working order.

**Provide information, instruction, training, and supervision about what things have been put in place to protect workers from inclement weather, and where relevant, what triggers are to be relied upon if inclement weather controls are not permanently in place.**

Training is not simply providing information. For training to be properly carried out, it requires delivery and assessment by a competent person. Information, instruction, and training must be done in a way that

accommodates all relevant workers including those who might be more vulnerable e.g. young, and culturally and linguistically diverse workers.

**Maintain and review the controls relied upon to protect workers from risks which may arise from inclement weather.**

Employers must ensure adequate resources are provided to implement and maintain control measures and their effectiveness. This includes providing periodical refresher training where relevant.

The timetable to review controls should happen at periods when the risk to workers can be reduced to the lowest level possible. A review is required:

- When the control measure is not effective in controlling the risk,
- Before a change at the workplace that is likely to give rise to a new or different health and safety risk that the control measure may not effectively control,
- If a new hazard or risk is identified,
- If the results of consultation indicate that a review is necessary, or
- If a health and safety representative requests a review.

Your HSR is there to play a crucial role in driving compliance with health and safety laws, if your employer doesn't have adequate controls in place to protect workers from inclement weather. If they need a hand, contact the AMWU. ●

FOR WORKPLACE NOTICEBOARD





# What's your boss doing to protect you on days like this?

**Employers must have adequate controls in place to protect workers from inclement weather. Your Health and Safety Representative is there to drive compliance with health and safety laws. If they need a hand, contact our union.**

