



NEW ZEALAND HAS UNACCEPTABLE WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY RECORD

New Zealand has an unacceptable and unsustainable workplace health and safety record, and changing it will require the combined efforts of government, businesses, workers, unions and society as a whole, according to the chair of an independent taskforce on workplace safety and health, Rob Jager.

The taskforce has been established by the Government to review the current health and safety system. The Government wants a 25 per cent reduction in the rate of workplace fatalities and serious injuries by 2020.

New Zealand's national statistics are "sobering, unacceptable and ultimately unsustainable," said Jager, chair of the Shell Companies in New Zealand and general manager, Shell Todd Services.

New Zealand's workplace injury rates are about twice that of Australia and almost six times that of the United Kingdom, according to the document.

The taskforce released a consultation document last month, containing a litany of sobering statistics. Each year:

- more than 100 people die from workplace accidents;
- between 700 and 1000 people die as a result of gradual work-related diseases;
- more than 6000 people notify the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment of a serious harm incident in their workplace;
- around 190,000 people claim medical costs from the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) as a result of being harmed at work. Of those claiming ACC medical costs, around 23,000

people are injured seriously enough to be off work for more than a week; and

- around 370 people are injured seriously enough to require hospital care and be diagnosed with a life-threatening condition.

Latest figures available for work-related injuries (2008-2010) show New Zealand has 102 fatalities per annum at a rate of 4.1 per 100,000 workers, and 369 non-fatal serious injuries, at a rate of 16 per 100,000 workers. The annual economic and social cost of work-related injuries is around \$3.5 billion.

Based on claims made to ACC for work-related injuries, the consultation document identifies certain groups as being more likely to come to workplace harm. Males are more likely to be injured or killed at work than females; older workers are more vulnerable than other age groups, Māori workers are more likely to be seriously injured at work; and self-employed workers are more likely to be injured at work than workers in employment relationships. New employees or those in temporary, casual or seasonal work may be particularly at risk. Workers engaged in non-standard work arrangements, such as temporary and casual work, are at greater risk of injury than those in permanent, full-time positions.

Longer and irregular working hours are associated with increased injury risks, particularly related to fatigue. Unlike other jurisdictions, New Zealand has no regulations governing maximum working hours in health and safety legislation.

There are no official rates for workplace illness and occupational disease. A 2004 National Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee

study estimated there were 17,000 to 20,000 new cases of occupational disease each year, of which 2000 to 5500 were considered severe.

Referring to worker participation in workplace health safety, the consultation document says international research shows worker participation and engagement is important and most effective when workers are supported in their roles with training and legislation. New Zealand has a variety of mechanisms in place to support worker participation and a significant number of health and safety representatives have been trained since 2002.

The taskforce is holding public meetings this month through to early November. Submissions close on November 16. The taskforce will review submissions and then write its final report, which is to be presented to the Government at the end of April next year.

The six-strong taskforce includes the Council of Trade Unions policy director and economist Bill Rosenberg.

Commenting on the consultation document, NZNO's associate industrial services manager Glenda Alexander agreed New Zealand's high toll of workplace deaths and injuries was unacceptable. Compliance with health and safety standards by both employers and employees was vital. There was no room for short cuts or a "she'll be right" attitude. Alexander is concerned financial pressures and worker stress caused by the recession could lead to more accidents.

The full consultation document, along with submission forms, is available at www.hstaskforce.govt.nz. •

ON REPORT ON AGED CARE

The other advocates were NZNO Auckland organiser Fuao Seve, and Alastair Duncan and Penny Clark from the SFWU. •

The NZNO/SFWU negotiating team, standing, left to right: Jeanette Browning, EN, NZNO delegate, Auckland; Penny Clark, SFWU organiser, Wellington; Elma Turnbull, health care assistant (HCA), NZNO delegate, Whakatane; Joselyn Ebu, physio assistant, NZNO delegate, Christchurch; Fuao Seve, NZNO organiser, Auckland; Julie Heritage, HCA, NZNO delegate, Auckland; and Carolyn Maslin, HCA, NZNO delegate, Christchurch. Sitting, left to right: Jamie Toko, SFWU organiser, Auckland; Vaimaila Malio, HCA, SFWU delegate, Auckland; Manny Anderson, HCA, SFWU delegate, Hamilton; Edmund Florendo, RN, NZNO delegate, Whanganui; and Angelique Murphy-Mark, HCA, SFWU delegate, Wellington.



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