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New OHS regulations must make protecting workers the priority, not business profits

Workplace safety is at risk from a business push to water down new OHS regulations, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said that an estimated 7000 workers died from workplace injury or disease each year in Australia and another 640,000 were injured, and that eternal vigilance was needed to make workplaces safer.

“Attempts by employer groups to weaken the new regulations are yet another example of business putting profits before safety,” Ms Kearney said.

“Employer groups called for a national set of health and safety laws, and we would have thought that business would welcome a tough approach to OHS regulations.

“Workplace safety laws exist to make sure workers get home to their families safely at the end of each work day, and can go back to work the next day.”

Ms Kearney, who will today address the annual ACTU OHS and Workers’ Compensation Conference in Brisbane, said the employers were running a scare campaign that ignored evidence the changes would not make life harder for business

“This renewed opposition from big business has emerged despite a regulatory impact statement by highly-respected independent consultancy, Access Economics, which found the new regulations would not increase compliance requirements or costs,” she said.

“The ultimate aim of the regulations must be to protect workers’ safety, not reduce the amount of work business must do to comply. It is baffling to think any business would want to risk the death of a mother, father, son or daughter for the sake of a little less paperwork.

“I doubt anyone who has lost a loved one or a colleague at work would have any sympathy for the views of business on this issue.”

Ms Kearney will also tell the conference that despite the important role of government regulators, improvements to workplace safety are best achieved through workers acting together.

“Academics can guide our thinking on safety, OHS specialists can measure hazards and Governments can make laws for safety, but the truth is workplaces will only get safer when workers have a collective voice,” she said.

“It’s only through unions that they can find that.”

MEDIA ADVISORY

The ACTU OHS and Workers’ Compensation Conference is at the Royal on the Park, Corner of Alice and Albert Streets, Brisbane today and tomorrow.

The Minister for Workplace Relations, Chris Evans will deliver the keynote address at 9.05am, and Ms Kearney will speak at 10am.

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