

Tuesday, 1 October 2019

Health and safety reps crucial as mental injuries at work become fastest growing injury

Safe work month highlights the importance of safety in the workplace, calling on workers to 'be a safety champion' and leaders for work health and safety within their organisation or industry.

The ACTU is highlighting the vital role occupational health and safety (OHS) representatives make in the workplace at a time when four people are dying at work every week and physical and mental injuries are impacting thousands of people every year.

The recent *Work Shouldn't Hurt* survey found that three in five working people had experienced mental illnesses or injuries like stress, depression, or anxiety at work as a result of their employer or workplace failing to manage poor working conditions. These poor work conditions included exposure to occupational violence (abuse, threats, or assault at work by clients, students, customers, the public, or co-workers).

The survey showed that many workers had been abused and bullied by management and co-workers. Some cried every day because of the stress. Some took to eating lunch in their cars to get just a moment's peace. Some left the workforce and never returned, unable to face another day in a hostile and toxic environment.

We need better rights for workers' representatives to enforce safety so that no one is hurt at work. Work shouldn't hurt. Unions play a vital role in making sure that work is healthy and safe.

The survey found that 98 percent of workers said there should be work health and safety regulations specifically dealing with mental health conditions and psychological risks and hazards.

We have a lot of work to do to make sure that OHS representatives are properly trained and resourced to be able to address the quick rise of mental health injuries at work.

Key findings to draw on from the *Work Shouldn't Hurt* survey:

- 98% said unions should have a role in work health and safety;
- 98% said there should be work health and safety regulations specifically dealing with mental health conditions and psychological risks and hazards;
- 91% said unions should be able to immediately enter a workplace if there is a health and safety concern;
- 90% said they thought it would be helpful to have access to a union representative;
- 61% said they have experienced poor mental health because their employer or workplace had failed to manage or address poor work conditions.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien

“Everyone has the right to go to work and come home safely, but increasingly workers are going home with mental health injuries as a result of their work. This isn't good enough.

“Mental health injuries are on the rise. The Morrison Government must urgently act to ensure that employers take workplace mental health seriously.

“Unions play a crucial role in making sure that work is safe, but the Morrison Government's laws are failing working people. We need an overhaul of model work health and safety laws.

“We call for urgent action to prevent workplace deaths and injuries and illnesses as a result of work. All 34 recommendations of the Government's own review – the Boland review – must be implemented.”

ENDS

Media contact: Kate Shuttleworth 0447 418726, 03 9664 7337