

Tuesday, 13 October 2015

Three workers killed every week in 2015, vigilance on workplace safety must be made a priority

Australian Unions are meeting this week in Canberra for the 2015 ACTU Occupational Health Safety and Workers Compensation Conference to discuss how to tackle significant workplace safety issues and barriers.

This comes as Safe Work Australia figures show there have been 126 workplace fatalities in Australia already this year (to 12 October). This equates to three fatalities each week on average.

The highest number of recorded fatalities occurred in the transport, postal and warehousing sector, which have accounted for 42 deaths so far in 2015.

Data from the agency also shows 531,800 workers are injured – 118,000 of those seriously – each year, costing Australia more than \$60 billion annually.

The annual ACTU Occupational Health Safety and Workers Compensation Conference will bring together a range of academic experts, along with legal specialists and union leaders to focus on the latest research and work through real-life issues in an attempt to help build a healthier and safer work force.

An additional area of concern that the conference will focus on is workplace mental health and bullying. Despite the introduction of anti-bullying legislation in 2014, workplace bullying remains under-regulated and affects both men and women causing long term physiological issues and in the worst cases, death.

In 2012-13 (the latest data available), 9.4% of all serious Workers Compensation claims made by women were for mental disorders and there was a 17% increase in the number of serious claims caused by mental stress.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary, Michael Borowick:

"Worker safety is just another in a string of issues where the government is prioritising its big-business backers, rather than supporting the rights of everyday Australians."

"With three workers losing their lives every week on average in Australian workplaces so far this year, it's clear that this is an area that needs more attention, not less."

"As we've seen with the attacks on penalty rates, lack of action on the minimum wage, and proposed cuts to paid parental leave, this is a government prepared to cut corners in the workplace, with disastrous effects."

"OH&S regulations and Workers Compensation rights are not prohibitive red tape to be cut in a misguided deregulation drive, they are a sensible, best-practice approach to ensuring workers can get on with their jobs without having to worry about the risk of injury or death."

"Employers, governments and unions must work together to ensure safety is at the highest level in our workplaces because we can do a lot better than we currently are."

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