

### 700,000 injured at work

Statistics released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that almost 700,000 Australians suffered a work-related injury or illness in the last 12 months.

The manufacturing industry had the highest injury rate at 37 injuries per 1000 workers; this rate has increased by 17% over the past 3 years.

Trades people, labourers, production and transport workers were most at risk with more than one in ten affected by workplace incidents. Approximately 74 out of every 1000 men and 51 out of every 1000 women were hurt or became ill from work related causes.

Strains and sprains were the most commonly reported injuries (30 per cent) followed by cuts or open wounds and chronic joint or muscle conditions.

The figures show that more than 40 per cent of those injured had not received OHS training.

### BP executives quizzed on OHS

Shareholders recently called for BP Chairman Lord Browne and other executives to have their bonuses tied to the company's safety and environmental performance. The call was made in the wake of the disastrous fire at Texas City Refinery, which killed 15 workers and injured 170 in 2005.

An independent panel set up by the US government criticised the company for 'systemic failures' in safety practices and fined the company \$21 million for over 300 breaches of federal health and safety regulations.

A spokesperson for BP stated that the company had already taken steps to improve safety and that Lord Browne's 2005 bonus had been cut from £2.28 million to £1.75 million!

### Queensland professor finds IR changes increase stress

Queensland university professor and occupational physician Nicki Ellis has found that recent IR changes have increased stress levels. Ellis says she was struck by the attitude of denial

towards workplace stress in Australia, particularly compared to the UK, where stress management standards were introduced in 2005.

She said 'employer groups had been extremely successful in blocking any action to address workplace stress in Australia and that the whole issue had been ignored by the ASCC'.

Professor Ellis claims 'increased casualisation and insecure employment have had a huge negative effect on OHS. In past decades, research has shown occupational stress was worse for people with little control over their work'.

### New workplace rights body to monitor safety

The Queensland Industrial Relations Commission has recommended that a new body be set up to monitor the effects of Work Choices; particularly its impact on health and safety. The QIRC report stated ... Work Choices had made employees 'apprehensive about job security' when raising OHS matters.

Qld employment and IR minister John Mickel claimed that 'an advocate working for employees is needed, because all the cards are stacked in favour of employers'. He gave no indication as to when the new body would be constituted.

### Meeting on federal gov't. national OHS legislation push

The Australian Safety and Compensation Council has released the first draft of the proposed 'common elements' for nationally uniform OHS legislation. The document suggests a significant move toward employer self-regulation. ACTU OHS Officer Steve Mullins will be in Brisbane on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> March from 10am to 1pm to hold a workshop on the issues that surround Comcare and nationally uniform OHS legislation. A venue has not yet been decided. For details contact Pamela Grassick [pg@safework.qld.edu.au](mailto:pg@safework.qld.edu.au)

### Comcare gathers steam

The federal government push to nationalise OHS and workers

compensation is gathering pace. New private companies including Optus, Linfox, K&S Freighters, NAB and John Holland have now joined Comcare, the system previously covering commonwealth public service employees only.

These companies are primarily motivated by insurance premiums, however in the long run this could be a false economy. Comcare average premium is 1.77% compared to NSW at 2.17% and SA 3%. In the short run there may be savings, however, as more 'higher risk' industrial employers join Comcare, premiums will rise. Also, state WC schemes will lose their financial base and also become more expensive, particularly for small business.

To promote Comcare the federal government have recently removed journey claims and tightened definitions for 'employment contribution' and 'stress claims'.

Other employer incentives will include reduced regulation and consultation requirements under the associated OHS legislation. This will include restricting powers of workplace Reps and watering down obligations using 'reasonably practicable' requirements.

Further cuts in workers compensation benefits can also be expected. Employers are now asking for the Comcare benefit structure to be reviewed. eg the AI Group want full pay cut after 12 weeks from the current 45 weeks.

### International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers

28<sup>th</sup> April is the International Commemoration Day (ICD) for Dead and Injured Workers (previously known as the International Day of Mourning).

National activities are being planned for the day. In Brisbane, an ecumenical church service will be held at St Mary's (South Brisbane) on Monday the 30<sup>th</sup> April.

Details will be circulated.