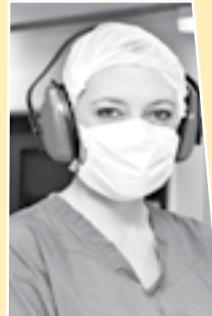


*The first progress report on*  
**The Australian Work Health and  
Safety Strategy 2012-2022**



*Healthy, safe and productive working lives*



*The first progress report on*

## **The Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022**

*Healthy, safe and productive working lives*



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# Introduction

The Australian Strategy builds on the work of the National OHS Strategy 2002-2012 and provides a framework to drive improvements in work health and safety (WHS) in Australia. It promotes a collaborative approach between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, industry and unions and other organisations to achieve the vision of *healthy, safe and productive working lives*.

The Australian Strategy sets four outcomes to be achieved by 2022

- » reduced incidence of work-related death, injury and illness, achieved by
- » reduced exposure to hazards and risks using
- » improved hazard controls and supported by
- » an improved work health and safety infrastructure.



Figure 1: The Australian Strategy

Development of the Australian Strategy began in 2011 with an extensive consultation process across Australia involving industry organisations, unions, government representatives, leading businesses, academics and professional practitioners and community organisations.

The Australian Strategy was formally endorsed by Workplace Relations Ministers, the ACTU, ACCI and the Ai Group and launched by the Commonwealth Minister on 31 October 2012.

Activities to support the Australian Strategy are being coordinated by Safe Work Australia. It is the Safe Work Australia Members, in particular the WHS regulators, who collectively and individually implement specific policies, programs and services to support improvements in Australian workplaces.

As the Australian Strategy evolves it is anticipated businesses and organisations with a commitment to achieving the vision of *healthy, safe and productive working lives* will independently implement activities within the scope of their interests.

This first annual progress report, covering the period 1 October 2012 to 30 September 2013 provides a snapshot of the diverse activities undertaken by Safe Work Australia and Safe Work Australia Members.

The case studies included in this report and on [www.swa.gov.au](http://www.swa.gov.au) reflect just some of the innovative activities being undertaken by Safe Work Australia, WHS regulators, employer organisations and unions.

The following snapshot of activities shows the strong commitment between jurisdictions, industries, unions, researchers and professional associations to collaborate and to create healthier, safer and more productive working lives for Australians.



## ACTION AREAS

The action areas focus national strategic activity on areas which collectively are expected to result in the greatest improvement in WHS.

### WHY IS THE DESIGN OF STRUCTURES, PLANT AND SUBSTANCES IMPORTANT?

In 2012-13 vehicle collisions, being hit by moving or falling objects and falls from heights remained the most common cause of worker death and traumatic injuries in Australia.

The most effective and durable means of creating a healthy and safe working environment is to eliminate hazards and risks during the design of new plant, structures, substances and technology and of jobs, processes and systems. Design processes need to take into account hazards and risks that may be present at all stages of the lifecycle of structures, plant, products and substances.

### WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Safe Work Australia has undertaken a range of activities designed to increase awareness and knowledge of the importance of good design. Safe Work Australia is revising the *Guidance on the principles of safe design at work* (ASCC, 2006) and *Safe Design for Engineering Students* (ASCC 2006) documents to reflect requirements under the model WHS legislation.

Plant and equipment designs need to suit workers' size and shape. Previous research has shown Australia does not have this information. The report *Defining the method and scientific parameters for the Australian Body Sizing Survey* has created international interest and is an important next step to collecting this information.

The WHS regulators have continued their historically strong focus on promoting better understanding by designers, manufacturers, importers and suppliers of their legal obligations.

NSW funded \$1.3m for world-first research on the dynamic handling testing of quad bikes in their *Quad Bike Safety Research Project*.

*Townsville Hospital's Redevelopment Project - Safer Manual Handling of Plasterboard* campaign has resulted in a 25-30 per cent productivity increase by creating safer workplaces.

### WHY IS THE DESIGN OF WORK IMPORTANT?

Exposure to biomechanical hazards, physical risks and mental stress continue to be the leading cause of musculoskeletal injuries and mental disorders.

Good design can eliminate or minimise the major physical, biomechanical and psychosocial hazards and risks associated with work. Effective design of the overall system of work will take into account, for example, management practices, work processes, schedules, tasks and workstation design.



## THE ROLE OF DESIGN IN WORK-RELATED FATAL INJURY

The first Australian Safety and Compensation Council report (2004) considered work-related deaths that occurred in Australia between 1 July 2000 and 30 June 2002. Seventy-seven work-related deaths (37% of identified workplace deaths) definitely or probably involved design-related issues were identified.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Safe Work Australia Members have begun the first phase of the *Good Work Through Effective Design* project by examining the major physical, biomechanical and psychosocial hazards and risks that need to be considered during work design.

*Working Together: Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing at Work Guide* developed by Comcare, the [APSC](#) and Safe Work Australia provides practical advice for managers and workers.

The *People@Work* collaborative research partnership aims to increase the capacity of employers to identify and manage psychosocial risks and test the effectiveness of interventions designed to improve the psychosocial working environment.

Comcare's *Remote Worker* project is showing how good job design and management can improve the safety and welfare of workers in outback Australia.





## SUPPLY CHAINS AND NETWORKS

Supply chains and networks refers to the often complex chain or web of commercial or business relationships designed to provide goods or services like moving agricultural produce to a supermarket or car components to vehicle manufacturers.

## LABOUR HIRE EMPLOYMENT (ON-HIRE, TEMP OR AGENCY) INVOLVES THREE PARTY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SUPPLY OF LABOUR

Supply chains and networks cover commercial activities from manufacture, sourcing, production, transport logistics and the management systems needed to coordinate these activities. Businesses that make up the supply chain are linked together not just through physical arrangements but also information flows.

## WHY ARE SUPPLY CHAINS AND NETWORKS IMPORTANT?

Supply chain arrangements can and do have powerful impacts particularly on contractual arrangements for those who operate at the bottom of a supply chain such as small businesses. There is an increased use of outsourcing. This creates an opportunity for business leaders to drive and model improved workplace practices.

Businesses and organisations when choosing contractors or purchasing goods and services can positively influence others' behaviours by requiring they meet particular WHS standards.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is actively engaging with labour hire firms to increase their awareness of the role they can have to improve health and safety. They recently developed two guides:

- » Host employers: Managing the safety of labour hire workers provides information and tools to clarify WHS duties, identify major risks, provide appropriate induction and training, match workers to tasks, and to supervise and monitor workplace health and safety
- » Victoria's Plant and Machinery Suppliers Project targeted inherently unsafe machinery. Assisted by the regulator, designers, manufacturers and suppliers of machinery within the supply chain worked together to improve controls for hazardous plant and machinery.
- » Labour hire agencies: Managing the safety of on-hired workers assists those providing workers or apprentices to client companies to arrange placements that will not expose their people to harm.



## DEVELOPING WHS CAPABILITY NEEDS A STRONG AND EFFECTIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM

A key principle in WHS is that every person requires the capabilities— the knowledge, skills and resources—to fulfil their role in relation to work health and safety.

## IMPROVED WHS AWARENESS CAN INFLUENCE RISK TAKING

Younger workers are more likely than older workers to agree they sometimes skylarked at work taking risks that jeopardise their own and each other's safety

Source: *Motivations, Attitudes, Perceptions and Skills – What they said about work health and safety in 2010.*

## WHY ARE WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY CAPABILITIES SO IMPORTANT?

Those in control of work need to manage their business risks. They need to make informed decisions based on competent advice, whether this is from their own staff or external advisers.

Workers in turn need the education and training to be able to do their job safely.

To achieve all of these needs a strong and effective education system that understands and responds to the changing nature of work and workplace hazards and risks.

Recent reviews of the tertiary and vocational sectors have revealed the challenges for them to provide high quality training and relevant education for contemporary Australian business.

To provide appropriate advice and support compliance with WHS requirements, our regulators are developing their staff's capabilities.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

The Commonwealth, state and territory WHS regulators have for many years recognised and promoted innovative solutions through their own awards processes. Winners of nationally aligned categories represent their jurisdiction at the *Safe Work Australia Awards* held in April each year.

The eighth *Safe Work Australia Week* was celebrated from 21-27 October 2012. All Safe Work Australia Members undertook a range of activities to raise community awareness.

The Safe Work Australia *Safety Ambassador Program* encourages people to become safety Leaders in their own workplaces and communities. Jacinta Macaulay from Ron Finemore Transport received the 2012 *Safety Ambassador of the Year Award* in recognition of her initiative, leadership and consultation skills in making her own workplace safer.

## PROVIDING INFORMATION AND BUILDING CAPABILITY

A key Safe Work Australia initiative has been to publish information and practical advice on the obligations under the *model WHS legislation*.

The Ai Group provided businesses with videos and webinars to demystify the new safety laws for their members.

In the last year the WHS regulators continued their historically strong focus providing practical information and support for businesses through targeted rebates, worksite visits, and free coaching and mentoring such as through the *Safety Coach Pilot Program*. They published hazard and industry specific guidance much of it designed especially for small to medium enterprises.

The Master Builders Association (MBA) *Building Leadership Simulation Centre* is an innovative



## SAFETY COACH VISITS A SUCCESS

96 per cent of participants felt more capable and 100 per cent reported making work health and safety improvements.

## LEADERS NEED WHS SKILLS

Many Master of Business Administration courses do not adequately include work health and safety in core units despite the requirements for officers to exercise due diligence to ensure the business or undertaking complies with its WHS duties.

example where state-of-the-art simulation technology immerses the students in a virtual worksite. The training targets problem-solving, decision-making and leadership skills in the construction sector.

The [ACTU](#) and unions through their Registered Training Organisation provided [OHS and Health and Safety Representative](#) training and advice to their members.

## PROFESSIONALS' AND PRACTITIONERS' CAPABILITIES

There is evidence WHS skills are not yet being effectively integrated into education and training programs. Given their important role providing workplace advice this was and is a focus for Safe Work Australia, regulators and professional associations who continued to undertake projects to improve core competencies.

The WHS professional associations are collaborating to strengthen the skills of their members. Many are board members on a voluntary tertiary education recognition program overseen by the OHS Education Accreditation Board.

The Board recently compiled the [Developing OHS Capability Package](#) to assist employers and recruiters evaluate, and where appropriate, support development of capability in their WHS personnel.

The Board is also the custodian for the [OHS Body of Knowledge for Generalist OHS Professionals](#). This year Safe Work Australia funded the development of four additional chapters on: WHS jurisprudence; organisational culture; risk and decision making, and user centred and safe design, which will be published in 2014.

Under the Australian Strategy there is recognition of the importance of building a skilled inspectorate. Heads of Workplace Safety Authorities' (HWSA) collaboration on inspector training adopted nationally is focused on improving their technical skills and supporting more consistent application of WHS laws.



## STRONG COMMUNITY COMMITMENT TO WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY

100 per cent of people agree making workplaces safer is the 'right thing to do' and 98 per cent making workplaces safer ultimately benefits everyone.

The Australian community continues to rank work related injuries and illnesses as an important issue being ranked just after road accidents, cancer, and diet and exercise. This is despite the relatively small investment in work health and safety media campaigns compared to the other issues.

## INVESTORS PREFER SAFE WORKPLACES

Companies that accurately disclose their environmental and WHS information are considered more favourably by investors  
Source: [ACSI Report](#)

## WHY ARE LEADERS AND COMMUNITY ATTITUDES SO IMPORTANT?

Organisational cultures can be and are strongly influenced by their internal leaders and the broader community values and attitudes. Community expectations are powerful drivers of change and collectively influence the nation's health and safety culture. When the Australian community expects and demands work is free from harm failure to do so will generate community pressure and calls for action.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

For many years the WHS regulators and to a more limited extent employer associations and unions have run multi media campaigns to raise community awareness of the serious impact of workplace incidents on individuals, businesses and society. Some recent examples of jurisdictional campaigns are noted below.

In the ACT [Be a Workplace Hero](#) and [Speak up About Safety](#) campaigns urged ordinary workers to take action when they saw workplace hazards and risks.

The [Not Sure Ask](#) Victorian social media campaign encouraged young workers to speak up at work if they are unsure of how to do something safely.

The [Better Work Tasmania \(BWT\) Prototype Program](#) is testing an integrated incentive approach to

engage the broader community and specific workplaces in making health and safety a priority.

## WHY ARE ORGANISATIONAL LEADERS IMPORTANT?

A positive organisational culture created by good leadership is fundamental to ensuring workplace health and safety. There is strong evidence performance is improved when organisations address WHS risks as a priority together with other important business risks.

Organisations whether large or small know their reputation is an important element in business resilience and sustainability. Internationally and in Australia interest is growing in corporate social responsibility indicators which also include WHS. An important tool for leaders is to accurately measure their organisation's WHS performance and if desired, benchmark themselves against their peers.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Safe Work Australia is working with Macquarie University, the Safety Institute of Australia and CPA on a long-term project to standardise and improve business and organisational [WHS reporting](#).

In collaboration with Monash University, Safe Work Australia is also developing WHS indicators including one which would measure organisational culture.



## IMPORTANCE OF WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Australian community continues to rank work related injury and illnesses as a middle importance issue (46 per cent) following road accidents (59 per cent), cancer (54 per cent) and diet and exercise (48 per cent).

There is a strong commitment to work health and safety with 100 per cent agreeing that making workplaces safer is the 'right thing to do' and 98 per cent making workplaces safer ultimately advantages everyone [Research report on workplace culture](#).

## PACIA EXAMPLE

[PACIA Surpasses National OHS Targets](#)

The [Sustainability Leadership Framework](#) is an exciting ongoing program providing the platform for Plastics and Chemicals Industries Association members to turn environmental sustainability, security, product management and workplace health and safety into business opportunities.

Leaders attend particularly to messages coming from their peers. The [Queensland Zero Harm at Work Leadership Program](#) uses the power of peer to peer influencing. The program model has continued to evolve and be an exemplar for others. It now has over 250

companies participating and in 2012 provided grants worth more than \$200 000 to implement health and wellbeing workplace programs.

The [Zero Harm at Work Leadership Program](#) in South Australia is encouraging key decision makers to commit to improvements to reduce workplace injuries by 5 per cent each year.

In the [NSW WorkCover Mentoring Program](#) some of Australia's best safety leaders gave their time freely to assist 330 businesses improve their workplace health and safety.





## RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

The Safe Work Australia research, evaluation and data programs collect and provide unique robust national information to meet the needs of governments, employer associations, unions, researchers and the wider community.

## AUSTRALIA'S WORK-RELATED INJURIES AND ILLNESSES COSTS

Work-related injuries and illnesses cost \$60.6 billion 4.8 per cent of GDP.

### WHY IS EVIDENCE IMPORTANT?

A coordinated and cooperative approach is being used to provide national information on how many, where and why workers have died, been injured or made ill by work. This directly informs the national priorities and helps shape a more effective and efficient use of prevention resources.

The Safe Work Australia *Research, Evaluation and Data Strategy 2013–2017* has two distinct but complementary programs of work.

- » The Data Program collects and maintains accurate national outcomes data – including on the incidence of injuries, fatalities and illness and the associated economic costs.
- » The Research and Evaluation Program focuses on hazard surveillance and risk management, occupational illnesses, attitudes to WHS, and evaluation of interventions including the effectiveness of the Australian regulatory framework.

### WHAT IS BEING DONE TO PROVIDE THE EVIDENCE TO INFORM POLICY AND PRACTICE?

Safe Work Australia in collaboration with the jurisdictions has been improving the quality of the data on workplace deaths. Three main sources are being used:

1. [Monthly Notifiable Fatality report](#) – the most timely data source.
2. [Work-related Traumatic Injury Fatalities report](#) – the most comprehensive source using

information from workers' compensation data, coronial information, notifiable fatalities and the media.

3. The [Compendium of Workers' Compensation Statistics reports](#) – providing information on the circumstances of injury claims and includes people compensated for a disease-related fatality.

Safe Work Australia funds and oversees the [Australian Mesothelioma Registry](#) which identifies the sources and likelihood of past exposure to asbestos of work-related and non-work-related origin among newly diagnosed patients.

This year the ongoing National Occupational Hazard and Risk Management Surveillance Research Program examined exposures to noise, dust and vibration in agriculture.

In 2012 research on the extent and effectiveness of the model WHS legislation reform agenda commenced. This will be critical to inform the future WHS reviews of the Safe Work Australia Act. Projects included collection of baseline information on the:

- » costs and benefits of compliance with the model WHS regulations from senior managers, and
- » perceptions of work health and safety from business owners and representatives.

WHS regulators undertook data and research programs around key risk areas for their jurisdictions.

Work Health and Safety Queensland is conducting research underpinning WHS laws with a cost calculator tool



## THE INCIDENCE OF MESOTHELIOMA

The incidence of mesothelioma is likely to peak in the next 10 to 15 years.

assisting businesses to calculate the initial and often overlooked uninsured costs of real and potential workplace injuries.

## RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

Due to the expense and the requirement for highly specialised skills, research and data projects are often most effectively undertaken in collaboration with others. Below are some examples of recent

collaborations between regulators, academic institutions and industry, often across jurisdictions.

In 2012-13 strategic research programs were funded by two jurisdictions:

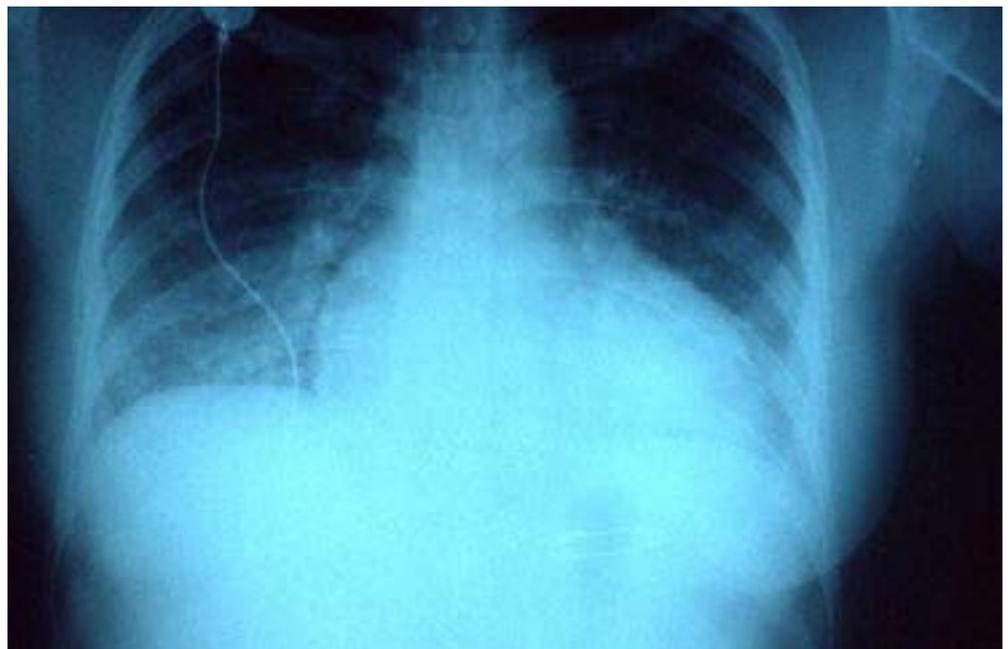
- » [SafeWork SA Grants programs](#) and
- » [ISCRR](#) research program by Worksafe Victoria, the Transport Accident Commission and Monash University.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For examples see the research collaborations on the [Safe Work Australia website](#).

[Sources of information](#)

[Risk awareness and perception of health and safety](#)



*Chest x-ray showing mesothelioma*



## APSC AND COMCARE ACT ON MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) and Comcare act to improve mental health in the workplace. The APSC and Comcare released the *Working Together: promoting mental health and wellbeing at work guide*. This guide aims to empower managers and workers to work together to build inclusive workplaces and effective systems for promoting mental health in the APS.

## HOW ARE GOVERNMENTS IMPORTANT DRIVERS OF WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY?

Governments directly and indirectly influence work health and safety within Australian businesses, organisations and in the broader community through the policies, programs and services they deliver

Governments are major purchasers of products and services. By incorporating work health and safety into government investment, procurement arrangements and contracts they can encourage suppliers to improve health and safety associated with their products and services.

The community and the private sector expect that Governments as major employers will exemplify good work health and safety practices within their own organisations. They can and do implement innovative approaches to risk management.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Safe Work Australia and the WHS regulators contribute to national, state and territory reviews on government policies which either directly or indirectly influence work health and safety. A recent federal government example was the *Commonwealth Government Parliamentary Inquiry* addressing community and public concerns about bullying in the workplace.

Safe Work Australia is examining how governments can more effectively incorporate WHS in each stage of the procurement process without unnecessarily increasing the regulatory burden.

Work is underway to replace or update the *ASCC Guidance on Occupational Health and Safety in Government Procurement* to ensure it reflects the requirements of the model WHS laws.

The pivotal role of government in modelling good work health and safety practice was identified in the previous National OHS Strategy. WHS regulators have continued to actively support government agencies in their jurisdictions to develop policies and programs to deliver improved WHS outcomes for their workers.

The ACT Government responded to the findings of the *Getting Home Safely* report into safety in the construction industry by ensuring government contracts are awarded to companies demonstrating a commitment and capacity to meet their workplace health and safety obligations. The *ACT Active Certification Policy* uses government purchasing power to drive improvements in ACT Government funded construction projects.

The *National Work Health and Safety and Injury Management* forum is an informal group sharing information, policies and strategies to improve public sector performance.



## FURTHER INFORMATION REPORTS

**Comparative Performance Monitoring Report** for more information on regulators' compliance and enforcement activity.

**Effectiveness of work health and safety interventions by regulators**

**Safe Work Australia Plant and Licensing Review**

## CASE STUDIES

**WorkCover NSW Explosives**

**WorkSafe ACT Compliance with work health and safety laws**

**Tasmania Log-truck initiative**

**Safe Work Australia Nanotechnology**

## WHY IS GETTING THIS RIGHT IMPORTANT?

WHS regulators recognise they need a flexible response when deciding how to deal with organisations with poor WHS practices. This includes consideration of the particular business circumstances such as their size, past history and environment – for example, if their work is high risk.

The community expects people should be able to come home safely and workplaces that expose their workers to serious risk, or cause death or serious injury will be held to account.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

The work to create a more nationally consistent regulatory framework across Australia began in 2009 under the National OHS Strategy 2002-2012.

During the reporting period for this first progress report five jurisdictions adopted the model WHS laws. On 1 January 2013, South Australia and Tasmania also adopted the new legislation.

Making minor adjustments to improve the workability of the new legislation is important. Safe Work Australia has set up a tripartite Implementation Temporary Advisory Group to continue to identify and resolve any ongoing interpretation and workability issues.

To assist businesses and organisations understand the new requirements, Safe Work Australia developed a suite of 43 model Codes of Practice, industry guidance and fact sheets. This information complements the extensive information already provided by the WHS regulators.

Mining activities significantly contribute to Australia's productivity but are also by their nature hazardous. Safe Work Australia worked with the relevant regulators on the National Mine Safety Framework. This aims to create greater uniformity and improved safety in this sector across Australia.

Safe Work Australia and WHS regulators are in collaboration with the Australian Forum of Explosives Regulators working to ensure greater national uniformity in explosives regulations. This will ultimately reduce the regulatory burden, improve safety and ensure a more competitive market place in Australia and internationally.

Businesses expect WHS regulators will be consistent and fair when applying the laws. HWSA respects this community expectation and adopted and commenced implementation of the National Compliance and Enforcement Policy. This sets out the principles underpinning the approach taken by the WHS regulators to monitor and enforce compliance.



## UNDERSTANDING REGULATORY EFFECTIVENESS

**The Australian National University Regulatory Institutions Network (RegNet) research program is involved in exploring and understanding critical domains of regulation.**

**RegNet receives funding from Safe Work Australia to assess the effectiveness of the model WHS laws. This work will be completed in 2016.**

The 2012 national compliance campaigns coordinated by HWSA were targeted at high risk industries including transport, agriculture, residential aged care and fraudulent high risk work licences.

HWSA developed consistent national approaches to such important matters as:

- » procedure for dealing with applications for asbestos-related licences, and
- » work health and safety undertakings.

Individual jurisdictions of course continue to review and improve their approaches to compliance and enforcement to ensure they respond to their local conditions.

Finally a responsive and effective regulatory framework needs to respond to new and emerging technologies and hazards. The Safe Work Australia Nanotechnology Program is an exciting example of a national and international contribution to productivity, innovation and health and safety in an emerging technology.



*Multiwalled carbon nanotube yarn*



## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Small businesses make a significant contribution to the Australian economy and employ 4.8 million workers. For a range of reasons they sometimes struggle with workplace issues. However owners know their business, know their risks and know their people. With targeted help from WHS regulators and industry groups they can be supported to work with their employees to implement practical solutions. This is a priority for all Australian governments.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

The Commonwealth, state and territory WHS regulators have all developed resources specifically to assist small business owners better understand and meet their obligations. These include access to: free advisory services, information sessions, fact sheets and tool kits.

Some recent examples have included:

- » SafeWork SA: Small Business Strategy, Small Employer Incentives Package; and [Seven steps for small business](#)
  - » WorkSafe WA: [ThinkSafe small business program](#)
  - » WorkSafe ACT: [Getting started – small business](#)
  - » Worksafe NT: [Business – rights and obligations](#)
  - » Ai Group: offered their members a series of business videos and webinars on the new WHS laws, and
  - » ACCI: WHS Introductory Information - assistance for small business videos and information.
- 
- » Work Cover NSW: [Small Business Strategy](#) , making it easier for small business, and [Safety Coach Program](#)
  - » WorkSafe Victoria: [Small Business](#)
  - » Worksafe Queensland: [Small to medium enterprises program](#)
  - » WorkCover Tasmania: [Small business safety resources and advisors](#)

# Priority industries



## FURTHER INFORMATION

[Australian Strategy Priority Industries](#)

[Safe Work Australia Model Codes of Practice](#)

[Safe Work Australia guides and factsheets](#)

## CASE STUDIES

[WorkCover NSW Focus on Wood Manufacturing](#)

[Comcare Remote Workers](#)

## FACT

**Over half of agricultural workers were employed farming sheep, beef cattle or grain ([preliminary data for 2011-12](#)).**

The Australian Strategy identified seven industry groups where there were high numbers and rates of injury and/or fatalities which were by their nature hazardous:

- » Agriculture\*
- » Road transport\*
- » Manufacturing\*
- » Construction\*
- » Accommodation and food services
- » Public administration and safety, and
- » Health care and social assistance\*

**Note:** \* indicates the same or similar group to the priority industries under the National OHS Strategy 2002-2012.

The 2012 data on performance in these industries is not yet available, so data used in this report reflects the impact of initiatives undertaken as part of the [National OHS Strategy 2002-2012](#).

Government, industry and unions have and continue to undertake significant work focusing on all the priority industries.

Because of their poor work health and safety record, the agriculture and road transport industries are a specific focus of efforts for all jurisdictions during the first five years of the Australian Strategy. This first progress report highlights some of the initiatives undertaken for these two priority industries.

## WHY IS AGRICULTURE A PRIORITY INDUSTRY?

In 2012, the agricultural industry employed 290 600 workers. However agriculture (including support services) accounted for nearly 20 per cent of all worker fatalities in Australia in 2012. This is more than seven times the fatality rate across all industries. This serious situation has resulted in increased Safe Work Australia and jurisdictional focus on the causes of these deaths.

Deaths in this industry were mainly from vehicle incidents including tractors, aircraft during mustering and quad bike use. *Handling livestock, riding horses and contacting overhead electrical wires* caused a significant percentage of fatalities and injuries.

The group most at risk were self-employed farmers over the age of 65 but those aged 55-64 years also experienced disturbingly high fatality rates.

People in the agricultural sector tend to be older with rising numbers over 65 years and declining numbers of younger workers. This pattern has implications not only for the future sustainability of their businesses but also their injury and illness profiles.

The [preliminary data for 2011-12](#) on serious workers' compensation claims indicated there were nearly 3000 claims made by agricultural employees for injuries or disorders requiring at least one week off work.



## FURTHER INFORMATION

WorkSafe WA  
[Quad bikes](#)

SafeWork SA  
[Agricultural intervention](#)

WorkCover NSW  
[Quad Bikes](#)

WorkCover NSW  
[priority on regional communities](#)

Similar to the death data these rates were significantly above those in most other sectors recording a 2 per cent increase from the previous year.

The majority of serious claims (27 per cent) were from *Body stressing*, followed by *Being hit by moving objects* other than an animal (26 per cent) and *Falls* (on the same level - 12 per cent and *Falls from a height* - 9 per cent). The main types of injuries or disorders were for: Sprains and strains of joints and muscles (37 per cent), Fractures (17 per cent) and Open wounds (12 per cent).

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

In this first year of the Australian Strategy Safe Work Australia released a special report: [Work-related Injuries and Fatalities on Australian Farms](#) to inform and focus national action. This report provides a profile of Australian farmers and an in depth examination of injuries and deaths on farms in 2010-11.

To support duty holders meeting their regulatory responsibilities Safe Work Australia finalised or commenced work on codes of practice and guidance material:

- » The model *Code of Practice Managing Risks of Plant in Rural Workplaces* was finalised
- » The model *Code of Practice on Working in the Vicinity of Overhead and Underground Electric Lines* was finalised, and

- » Work commenced on developing *Guidance on Horse Handling*.

All the WHS regulators undertook targeted campaigns in this sector for example:

- » The [NSW Sheep & Beef Cattle Industry Action Plan 2013-2014](#) addresses the highest risks in this sector including use of tractors, quad bikes, working with livestock, occupational diseases, child safety on farms, injury management and return to work.
- » The [WA agricultural field day](#) provided an opportunity for inspectors to give advice on quad bikes to suppliers, manufactures and farmers.
- » [South Australia as part of the HWSA agriculture intervention campaign](#) assisted farmers by providing basic tools and processes for farm safety management plans and systems for the safe use of plant and equipment.



## FACT

“Around 80 workers are killed each year while working in or around a truck “ said SWA Chair Ms Ann Sherry AO. “Not only is this disturbing in itself, but 30 per cent of these people die in single vehicle truck crashes.”

## FACT

Over the 10 years to 2012, 472 workers in the road transport sector were killed while at work.

## WHY IS ROAD TRANSPORT A PRIORITY INDUSTRY?

In 2012 the road transport industry fatality rate was 12 times the national average. The road transport industry makes up only 2 per cent of the Australian workforce but accounted for 18 per cent of those killed while at work.

The main cause of deaths was vehicle incidents and 78 per cent of these were in *single-vehicle incidents* on public roads.

The preliminary data for 2011-12 on serious workers' compensation claims indicate there were 4915 claims made by employees for injuries or disorders requiring at least one week off work, a 4 per cent decrease from the numbers of serious accepted claims in 2010-11. Nevertheless this was still significantly above the injury rate for other sectors.

Most serious claims in this sector resulted from Body stressing, followed by Falls. The main types of injuries or disorders that resulted in serious workers' compensation claims: *Sprains and strains* of joints and muscles (45 per cent), *Fractures* (9 per cent) and *Contusion with skin intact* (7 per cent).

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

In this first year of the Australian Strategy Safe Work Australia released a special report: *Work health and safety in the road freight transport industry*. This has drawn national attention to the serious rates of death and injury in this sector.

WHS regulators undertook targeted sector specific campaigns for example the:

- » *NSW Road Freight Transport Industry Action Plan* aimed at short and long distance and bulk freight transport provided incentives, practical advice and coaching on such diverse topics as onsite traffic management, manual loading/unloading, driver wellness and return to work / injury management.
- » The *Safer Restraints* project was a collaborative arrangement where Workplace Health and Safety Queensland worked with industry to test alternative load restraint devices to determine if they were safer than 'dogs or cheaters'.

# Priority disorders



## RESEARCH

**The National Research Program is providing data on current exposures to disease-causing hazards and the controls workplaces are using.**

**This will over time provide useful information to measure change.**

The Australian Strategy identifies six disorder categories as national priorities for the first five years of the Strategy. These were chosen based on the severity of consequences, the numbers of people estimated to be affected and the existence of known prevention options.

The priority disorders are:

- » musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)
- » mental disorders
- » cancers (including skin cancer)
- » asthma
- » contact dermatitis, and
- » noise-induced hearing loss.

For this first progress report three of the six priority disorders, MSDs, mental disorders and cancers are considered.

## HOW IS PROGRESS BEING MEASURED?

Measuring the progress of reducing occupational disorders is challenging. For some disorders it is intrinsically difficult to determine the contribution of work to the onset of the condition.

The exceptions are diseases for which there are only a limited number of causes (mesothelioma), where the work-related cause is well established medically (noise-induced hearing loss) or where there is a short interval between the work

place exposure to the cause of the disease and the onset and diagnosis of the disease such as asthma.

However, for the majority of occupational diseases and disorders there is a long latency period between the work-related exposure and diagnosis.

There are usually a wide variety of contributing factors to the development of these diseases and disorders including lifestyle and non-work-related factors. Because of the difficulty proving work contribution (for the purposes of workers' compensation claims) it is likely the available national data underestimates the true incidence and burden of work-related priority disorders.

An important note is for long latency disorders the incidence data reflect historical exposure patterns which in many cases we know to have improved.

So with the exception of short latency diseases, it is unlikely interventions and programs undertaken as part of the Australian Strategy will have a measureable impact on the incidence of work-related diseases and disorders during the period of the Australian Strategy (2012–2022).

Despite this, it is still worth monitoring occupational disorder statistics. Trends over time provide an indication of whether or not progress is being made in reducing



## WHAT IS BODY STRESSING?

Body stressing is muscular stress from manual handling, lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling objects or stress from physical movements such as holding a posture or making repetitive movements.

the incidence. The statistics provide a tangible reminder of the hazards and risks associated with work and the motivation to reduce these risks.

The Occupational disease indicators report uses a range of data sources to track health outcomes especially for long latency disorders. A better measure of progress in preventing long latency disorders will be to monitor changes in exposure to the disease causing hazards and the use and effectiveness of known controls in Australian workplaces.

## WHY ARE MSDS A NATIONAL PRIORITY?

MSDs are the most commonly compensated work-related condition. Muscular disorders include strains and sprains of joints and adjacent muscles; disorders of muscle, tendons and other soft tissues; and sometimes hernias. Skeletal disorders can include fractures, disorders of the bones, joints and cartilage.

Most claims for MSDs are from *body stressing*.

The incidence rate of workers' compensation claims involving MSDs caused by body stressing decreased over the period 2000-01 to 2010 reflecting the interventions that occurred as part of the National OHS Strategy 2002-2012.

*'Over the period 2000-01 to 2008-09 there was an overall downward trend in the incidence of MSDs: the incidence rate for all claims involving MSDs that were caused by body stressing decreased by 28 per cent'*

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

All the WHS regulators publish specific guidance on manual tasks; many of these providing very targeted industry advice. Because MSDs can lead to serious human and financial costs, all WHS regulators routinely invest significant inspectorate resources in undertaking related compliance support and enforcement activities.

A recent Queensland example is the *PErforMing* and getting results project, a simplified manual tasks risk management program which involves workplace-based teams devising manual tasks solutions for their high risk manual tasks. Over 2011-12, the participating companies claims frequency and costs reduced, resulting in a subsequent 30 per cent decrease on their workers compensation insurance premium.

The Safe Work Australia and Curtin University project on *Lost productivity due to musculoskeletal pain in young workers* is helping to fill a current gap in understanding of work productivity loss associated with musculoskeletal pain in young adults and so inform national and local initiatives.

## WHY ARE MENTAL DISORDERS A PRIORITY?

Mental stress is the leading cause of work-related and compensable mental disorders, causing significant personal distress to affected individuals and lost productivity for the businesses concerned.



## RESEARCH

### Younger workers at risk: Absenteeism and presenteeism in Raine Study 23 year olds

Mental stress claims are also the most expensive form of workers' compensation claims because of the often lengthy absences from work.

The rate of workers' compensation claims for mental disorders caused by mental stress increased between 2000-01 and 2003-04 and then decreased. However, the rate increased again in both 2009-10 and 2010-11, though preliminary data for 2011-12 suggests a decline in rates.

In 2011-12 there were more mental stress claims made for *Work pressure* than any other sub-category. However the hazards that result in mental stress claims vary with the workers' age and gender.

Younger workers are more likely to make claims as a result of *Exposure to workplace or occupational violence*, whereas *Work pressure* is the main cause of mental stress claims for older workers, peaking for those aged 45-49 years.

Women are three times more likely than men to make a workers' compensation claim due to *Work-related harassment and/or workplace bullying*.

For the industries with the highest number/rate of mental stress claims, the majority of claims were for *Work pressure*. This was particularly true in the Education sector. Claims for *Exposure to workplace or occupational violence* were notable in the Retail trade industry, while the Transport and storage and Health and community services industries dominated claims for *Exposure to a traumatic event*.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

The WHS laws recognise the importance of preventing mental disorders with the expansion of the definition of harm to include psychological harm.

In this first year of the Australian Strategy to focus national attention and inform prevention activity on mental disorders SWA released *The Incidence of Accepted Workers' Compensation Claims for Mental Stress in Australia*.

To address community and public concerns about mental disorders caused by bullying the Commonwealth Government announced a Parliamentary Inquiry to which Safe Work Australia made a submission. The Inquiry's report *Workplace Bullying We Just Want it to Stop* was tabled in Parliament on 26 November 2012. Safe Work Australia was asked to action ten of the 23 recommendations made in the report.

As a result of this report, Safe Work Australia urgently finalised the draft model *Code of Practice: Preventing and Responding to Workplace Bullying*. The revision took into account public comment and the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry and has now been issued as guidance.

Safe Work Australia is a member of the *Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance* which brings together key stakeholders committed to work collaboratively to promote workplace mental health.



## REPORT

Check out the full report on the Safe Work Australia website: [Occupational Disease Indicators 2012](#)

The WHS regulators have identified the need for better tools to measure workplace mental health risks and the effectiveness of controls.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland via the [People@Work](#) project is working collaboratively with a range of partners to develop a tool for business and inspectors. This project assists businesses and organisations to conduct a psychosocial risk assessment measuring how different workplace characteristics influence worker health and wellbeing. It focuses particularly on risks to psychological health.

Comcare's [Preventing psychological injuries in the workplace](#) campaign continues to work to promote better risk management, and provide targeted compliance support including inspections, audits and best practice forums.

## WHY ARE CANCERS A PRIORITY?

“Cancer” is a term for diseases in which abnormal cells multiply without control. The term is used to encompass a range of diseases such as mesothelioma, melanoma or lung cancer.

There is currently no available data on the real magnitude of occupational cancers in Australia. Because of difficulties in proving causation, and the long lag time between occupational exposures and disease diagnosis very few cancers are reported to compensation authorities. Therefore to estimate the rates of occupational cancer indirect methods which determine what proportion of known cancers might be due to occupational causes are used.

The [2006 report](#) on occupational cancer in Australia estimated that occupation was responsible for about 11 per cent of incident cancers in males and 2 per cent in females. This equates to about 5000 cancers a year. It was also estimated approximately 1.5 million workers in Australia were potentially exposed to carcinogens at work.

The incidence rate of workers' compensation claims for occupational cancer peaked in 2003-04 at 66 claims per million employees and then declined to 49 claims per million employees in 2010-11. This reflected a similar pattern in the incidence rates for skin cancers which was the single largest cancer category for which claims are made.

The latest data from the [occupational indicators report](#) found occupations with the highest rates of workers' compensation claims over the three-year period 2006-07 to 2008-09 for cancers include: Railway labourers; Electrical distribution tradespersons; Freight and furniture handlers (these included Stevedores); Sea transport professionals; Communications tradespersons; Gardeners; Carpentry and joinery tradespersons; Plumbers; Truck drivers and Electricians.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Over the last few decades the WHS regulators have invested considerable efforts to increase workplace and community awareness of the need to prevent exposure to workplace carcinogens.

In 2012 the [model Code of Practice Managing Risks of Hazardous Chemicals in the Workplace](#) was released. It provides practical



## FACT

The manufacturing of asbestos was banned in 1983 in Australia. It was in use in Australia until the end of 2002.

guidance and supports the WHS regulations and guidance material on hazardous workplace chemicals produced by the WHS regulators.

The ongoing work of the regulators, Safe Work Australia, industry WHS and union representatives and community advocacy groups in preventing exposure to hazardous chemicals is well illustrated on their respective websites.

## FOCUS ON MESOTHELIOMA

Mesothelioma is a cancer caused by exposure to asbestos. Because Australia was previously a major producer and user of asbestos we have high rates of mesothelioma and asbestosis.

The incidence rate of mesothelioma per million population has increased over time, from 12 in 1982 to a peak of 32 in 2003. In 2008, the rate of new cases of mesothelioma was 29 per million population. However, due to the long latency of this disease and the exposure periods to asbestos it has been estimated that this rate will continue to increase, reaching a peak in the next 10 to 15 years.

Safe Work Australia commenced funding the Australian Mesothelioma Registry (AMR) managed by NSW Cancer Institute to provide

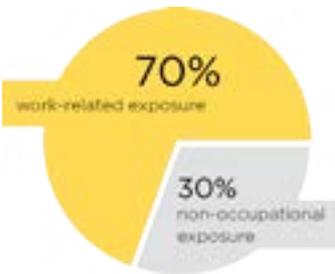
better data on the incidence of mesothelioma. This Registry replaces the previous Australian Mesothelioma Register managed by the former National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC).

The AMR measures and monitors the incidence of mesothelioma in Australia and the mortality associated with mesothelioma. The AMR also documents the likely asbestos exposure experience of people diagnosed with mesothelioma.

All Australian WHS regulators are providing compliance support to help prevent exposure to asbestos.

Activities in this area ranged from specific initiatives like the communication strategies on the ACT's website about safe asbestos removal for home renovators and tradesmen, to broadly focussed activities like South Australia's Open House target of 1000 workplace visits as part of its transitional educational program about the implementation of harmonised WHS legislation.\*

**\*Note:** ACT 'Mr Fluffy' activity is outside the reporting period?



# Measuring progress against the targets



## FOR INFORMATION

Data to measure the progress for the new Australian Strategy won't be available until mid-2014. Until then the metrics developed for the National OHS Strategy 2002-2012 will continue to be used.

The Australian Strategy sets three targets to measure the progress towards achieving the vision:

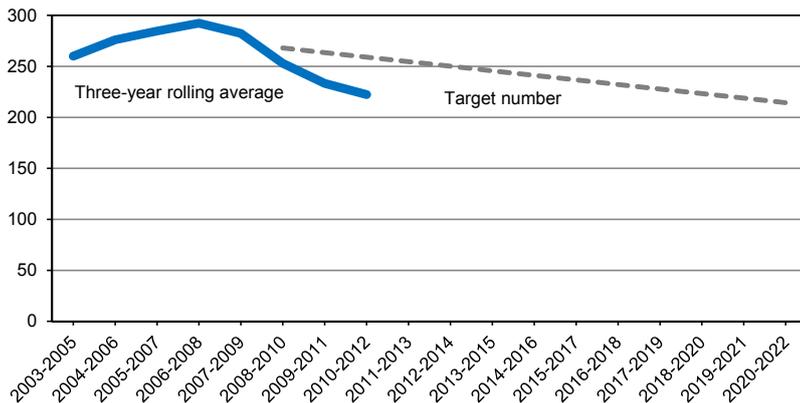
- » a reduction of at least 20 per cent in the number of worker fatalities due to injury
- » a reduction of at least 30 per cent in the incidence rate of claims resulting in one or more weeks off work, and
- » a reduction of at least 30 per cent in the incidence rate of claims for musculoskeletal disorders resulting in one or more weeks off work.

A range of performance indicators will also be developed to monitor progress towards Australian Strategy strategic outcomes.

In 2013 Safe Work Australia published the guide *Measuring progress towards targets - Reducing the incidence of work-related death, injury and illness*. This explains how progress on the outcome to *reduce the incidence of work-related death, injury and illness* will be measured for the Australian Strategy from 2012-2022.

## FATALITY TARGET

Reduce the number of worker fatalities by at least 20 per cent.



The starting point for the fatality target is the average number of fatalities over the four year period 2007-2010, which equates to 268 fatalities. A 20 per cent reduction requires there to be no more than 214 fatalities in 2022.

A three year rolling average will be used to measure progress towards this target. This will restrict the impact of year to year volatility in fatality numbers on the outcome of this target. Measurement will be completed in 2023 when the 2022 data is finalised.

The Australian Strategy fatality target will be measured using the Traumatic Injury Fatality (TIF) data collection. This is different to the previous National OHS Strategy where the fatality target was restricted to compensated injury-fatalities.

The TIF collection provides a more complete and accurate catalogue of work-related injury-fatalities as it includes the deaths of workers who were not covered by workers' compensation schemes (the self-employed) and those not eligible for compensation because they had no surviving dependents to make a claim.

Figure 2: Shows the three year rolling average number of fatalities 2003-05 to 2010-12 and reduction required to meet fatality target.

## SERIOUS WORKERS' COMPENSATION CLAIMS TARGETS

- » Reduce the incidence rate of claims involving one or more weeks off work by at least 30 per cent.

# Measuring progress against the targets



## FOR INFORMATION

**As comparisons should be made using final rather than preliminary data, the first comparison data point for the year 2012-13 will not be available until mid to late 2015.**

- » Reduce the incidence rate of claims for musculoskeletal disorders resulting in one or more weeks off work by at least 30 percent.

It is still too early to determine the starting (base period) incidence rates and therefore the end point incidence rates for these targets as the 2011-12 Workers' Compensation National Data Set (NDS) data will not be finalised until mid to late 2014. So progress against these targets will be measured by comparing progressive annual incidence rates to the base period rate.

However, the preliminary data for 2011-12 indicate employees in Australia made:

- » 128 050 serious workers' compensation claims, which is equivalent to 12.2 serious claims per 1000 employees.
- » 17 595 serious workers' compensation claims for musculoskeletal disorders, which is equivalent to 1.7 serious musculoskeletal disorder claims per 1000 employees.

**Note:** These figures are preliminary and expected to rise by about 3 per cent as claims are finalised.

The Australian Strategy defines serious claims as those non-fatal work-related injuries or illnesses that involve an employee requiring at least a week off work. The time off work does not need to be continuous. This is different to the definition of serious claims as applied under the previous National OHS Strategy and Comparative Performance Monitoring (CPM) reporting. Serious claims under the *National OHS Strategy* and

CPM included fatalities, permanent incapacities and temporary incapacities that involved at least one week time lost from work.

The National OHS Strategy's targets were to reduce the incidence of compensated work-related injury fatalities by at least 20 per cent and to reduce the incidence of serious compensated workplace injury (including musculoskeletal disorders) by at least 40 per cent, by 30 June 2012. Achievements against the national targets for injuries and fatalities are measured using the NDS and are reported on annually in the CPM reports.

The baseline for the national targets was calculated as the average incidence rate for the three-year period 2000-01 to 2002-03. Between the base period and 2011-12 there has been a 28 per cent reduction in the incidence rate of serious injury and musculoskeletal claims. Although the 2011-12 data will not be finalised until mid to late 2014, projections show that the target of a 40 per cent reduction in serious compensated injury claims will not be achieved.

In contrast, the incidence rate of compensated injury fatalities has fallen steadily over the past five years against a backdrop of rising employment. Since the base period there has been a 42 per cent decrease in the incidence rate of compensated injury fatalities. This is more than twice the decrease required to meet the target of a 20 per cent reduction by 30 June 2012.

# Conclusions



## COMING UP

The Australian Strategy Virtual Seminar Series will be held throughout October 2014.

This next progress report from October 2013 to 30 September 2014 is now due to commence development. This progress report will continue the strong focus on agriculture and road transport activities and include more the case studies and examples which will be showcased on Australian Strategy webpage.

This first year of the new Australian Strategy has seen the continuing work to build a modern regulatory framework including codes and guidance developed and published for the most serious hazards and risks.

A robust data and research program has provided evidence to inform national health and safety policies and programmes.

The WHS regulators have implemented a wide range of programs to support compliance and where required undertaken enforcement activity. The industry bodies and unions have continued to build the work health and safety skills of their members.

The action areas have stimulated new conversations with a broader range of stakeholders on the importance of work design and the powerful role of leaders particularly within supply chains.

In October 2014 the first Virtual Seminar Series on the Australian Strategy will provide opportunities to hear about more exciting projects to create healthier, safer and productive working lives.

To receive the latest news and information about the Virtual Seminar Series subscribe from the Safe Work Australia website.



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