



**safe work australia**

February 2024 | Issue 6

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*SWMS myth busted*

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*Prohibition of engineered stone – what's next?*

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*Welcome SWA graduates, class of 2024*

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*Psychological health in the workplace*

Quarterly

# News Update

## ***STAYING SAFE IN EXTREMES***

*Many people have jobs that require them to work outside in severe conditions, exposing them to work health and safety risks.*





# WELCOME TO THE SAFE WORK AUSTRALIA QUARTERLY UPDATE

In this issue we focus on the WHS hazard that is bushfires, look at the interactive tool for Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS), review the new sexual and gender-based workplace harassment model Code of Practice, find out more about the changes to our data dashboards and hear from our fantastic new graduate cohort.



Subscribe to Safe Work Australia News to receive our quarterly newsletter or get email updates across a range of topics including work health and safety, workers' compensation, data and statistics, model WHS laws and codes of practice.

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Many people have jobs that require them to work outside. Working outdoors in Australia involves work health and safety risks, including from extreme heat, sun exposure, bushfires, and extreme weather events such as storms and flooding.

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**SWMS myth busted**

SWMS are also notorious for being too long, too complex, mis-understood, or mis-used and may be considered more of a hindrance than a help. This is a myth that Safe Work Australia has been working to bust!

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**In case you missed it!**

We recently updated the model Code of Practice on managing risks of plant in the workplace.

Over the past few months, it has been my privilege to meet (and in some instances reconnect with) families affected by workplace fatalities.

Hearing their stories of loved ones who went to work and did not come home and the devastating impact this has had on their lives since, has underscored for me yet again why we do the work that we do. A healthy and safe workplace is a fundamental right and there is always more we can do to prevent workplace fatalities, illness and injury and to support injured workers to return to work.



What does this look like in practice for a national policy body? Well, there are many areas where I know we can make an impact, whether through collecting evidence, fulfilling our communication and education function or through evaluating, reviewing and improving the WHS framework. We need to be proactive and adapt swiftly to respond to the challenges and opportunities impacting the WHS landscape. Keeping up with technological change and seeing how that affects workplace safety, and ensuring workers, businesses and the broader community are well-placed to better manage the physical and psychosocial risks that come with change will be key.

Since I commenced as CEO, I have also met with the Safe Work Australia Chair, our Members in each state and territory, as well as the Commonwealth, and our worker and employer representatives. I am confident that we are all committed to a continuous improvement agenda for work health and safety and workers' compensation arrangements.

During my tenure I would like to see a refreshed commitment from all jurisdictions to the harmonisation project started almost 20 years ago. I'm sure those who had the vision, energy and drive to originally develop and implement the model WHS laws would expect us to build on the foundation they set by continuously reviewing and improving the laws as workplaces and working arrangements evolve.

The benefits and objectives of harmonisation have not changed. As we know the main objective of the Safe Work Australia Act is to provide for a balanced and nationally consistent framework to secure the health and safety of workers and workplaces. A harmonised national system provides greater certainty for businesses, especially those operating across jurisdictional borders. It also means that every worker in Australia, no matter where they work, can be confident of the same health and safety protections.

I also want to reinforce the importance of what I call 'WHS fundamentals' – genuine worker consultation, effective risk management, monitoring and evaluation, and competency and training. It's essential that these fundamentals are recognised as non-negotiables in the workplace. One of the challenges here is how to make often complex legislative language accessible to those who must apply the laws practically in their workplaces.

I would like to see us develop creative and innovative messaging and education materials that resonate with stakeholders, and support businesses, workers and the community to ensure a collective understanding of WHS duties, obligations and rights, how to meet them and how to access them.

Our work will only be successful in partnership with you and everyone who has an interest in WHS and workers' compensation! I look forward to leading this important work and helping to drive progress to make a positive difference to workers, businesses and communities across Australia.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marie Boland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M".

**Marie Boland**  
CEO Safe Work Australia

“  
***A healthy and safe workplace is a fundamental right and there is always more we can do to prevent workplace fatalities, illness and injury and to support injured workers to return to work.***  
”



# STAYING SAFE IN EXTREMES

“The environmental health and safety risks associated with working outside may be perceived as out of an employer’s control, but there are a range of reasonably practicable steps that a PCBU can take to manage the risks.”











James Costabile,  
Assistant Director,  
Data improvement  
and analysis

Many people have jobs that require them to work outside. Working outdoors in Australia involves work health and safety risks, including from extreme heat, sun exposure, bushfires, and extreme weather events such as storms and flooding.

## SUMMER SUN STATISTICS

What does the data tell us about the risks of working outside?

We’ve looked at the number of serious workers’ compensation claims where the sun was directly involved in inflicting the injury or disease and found that over the past 10 years:

<p>The most common types of diseases and illnesses from sun-related claims were:</p>	 <p>Malignant melanoma of skin</p>	<p>The occupations with the highest number of sun-related compensation claims were:</p>
 <p>Skin cancer</p>	 <p>Heat stress/heat stroke</p>	 Labourers
		 Truck drivers
		 Fire and emergency workers
		 Police
		 Gardeners



Labourers



Truck drivers



Fire and emergency workers



Police



Gardeners

## BUSHFIRES

With hot, dry conditions still in place across many parts of Australia, workplaces must prepare for the increased risk of bushfires. If you work in an area prone to bushfires, it is paramount that businesses are prepared and know how to keep workers safe. Exposure to heat, fire and smoke from bushfires can cause injuries, illness, and death.

To help businesses and workers, Safe Work Australia has recently developed an [information sheet](#), which explains how the [Australian Fire Danger Rating System \(AFDRS\)](#) and [Australian Warning System \(AWS\)](#) can assist in identifying and managing the risks of bushfires.

## HEAT

The human body needs to maintain a normal temperature to be healthy. Workers may suffer from heat-related illness if the body has to work too hard to keep cool or starts to overheat. We have a [checklist available](#) for managing the risks of heat in the workplace, along with information on first-aid for heat-related illnesses.



**JUST PUBLISHED!**  
**WORKING OUTSIDE  
IN SUMMER  
INFOGRAPHIC**

### MANAGING THE RISKS OF HEAT IN THE WORKPLACE

- **Is the environment hot or is there fire at the workplace?**  
*This contributes to incidents such as heat-related illness and burns.*
- **Are days and nights hotter than usual?**  
*A heatwave can make it harder to sleep and workers may become fatigued.*
- **Is it humid?**  
*High humidity makes it harder for the body to cool itself.*
- **Do people work during the hot part of the day or year?**  
*Scheduling work at certain times can increase or decrease risk.*
- **How often can workers take breaks somewhere cool?**  
*Working in heat for long periods of time is very dangerous.*
- **Is there air movement or a breeze?**  
*This can help cool workers.*
- **Is the work intense or long?**  
*The harder the body is working the more heat it needs to lose.*
- **Are workers physically fit and acclimatised?**  
*Fit and acclimatised workers can generally tolerate heat better.*
- **Do workers wear hot clothing (including PPE)?**  
*Some clothing can prevent air from circulating or sweat from evaporating.*
- **Are the workers qualified, trained and experienced?**  
*Experienced workers may be more efficient and use less energy for the same work. They may also be more aware of the hazards, health effects and controls.*
- **Do workers have medical conditions?**  
*Some conditions and medications can make workers less able to cope with heat.*
- **Is there cool drinking water or electrolyte drinks on hand?**  
*Dehydration can be dangerous and contributes to heat-related illness.*



# PROHIBITION OF ENGINEERED STONE

## WHAT'S NEXT?

In the last edition of our newsletter we discussed why we recommended to WHS ministers to prohibit the use of engineered stone in Australia.

In December last year, WHS ministers unanimously agreed with Safe Work Australia's recommendation to prohibit the use, supply and manufacture of all engineered stone in Australia, with the majority of jurisdictions to commence the prohibition from 1 July 2024.

### Why ban it?

The engineered stone prohibition aims to protect thousands of workers from breathing in respirable crystalline silica (or silica dust). Silica dust is generated in high levels when workers cut, shape, or polish engineered stone. Exposure to silica dust from engineered stone has led to a rapid increase in the number of workers developing the serious lung disease silicosis in Australia.

### What is Safe Work Australia doing now?

Safe Work Australia is progressing draft amendments to the model WHS Regulations. These draft amendments will be provided to WHS ministers this month. Each jurisdiction will need to implement these amendments in their own WHS laws for the changes to take effect. Repairs, minor modification, and removal of engineered stone products previously installed, will not be subject to the prohibition. Safe Work Australia is also developing a national framework to ensure the safe handling of previously installed engineered stone products.

### Are you still working with engineered stone?

Until the prohibition of engineered stone comes into effect, workers and businesses can continue to work with engineered stone, provided it is in a controlled manner. This includes the use of:

- water-based dust suppression systems, or
- on-tool dust extraction, or
- local exhaust ventilation systems, and
- respiratory protective equipment for workers.

### Want to know more?

Read our [frequently asked questions](#) page about the ban and what it may mean for you. Our website will be updated with information as it becomes available.



**Only high risk construction work needs to be included in a SWMS**

## SWMS MYTH BUSTED

### IT'S A TOOL TO SAVE LIVES, NOT AN INCONVENIENCE

A Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS) is a document that sets out the high risk construction work activities to be carried out at a workplace, the hazards arising from these activities and the measures to be put in place to control the risks.

SWMS are also notorious for being too long, too complex, mis-understood, or mis-used and may be considered more of a hindrance than a help. This is a myth that Safe Work Australia has been working to bust! We recently launched an [interactive online guidance tool](#) that sets out to remove the 'in' from inconvenience.

“

*The new tool, which has been under construction (sorry, I couldn't resist) for some time, helps you understand, prepare and use a SWMS in the correct way.*

*The tool includes simple to follow, clear instructions, with the additional benefit of some videos to assist, a detailed list of examples of high risk work and resources for each jurisdiction. By providing this resource we hope to influence all of our stakeholders to reduce the complexity of their individual SWMS requirements. We want people to embrace SWMS as a tool to save lives, rather than an irritation or mandatory paperwork that holds little use.*

*We invite you to [try out the tool](#) and provide us with any feedback you may have.*



Nathan Lee  
Director, High Risk  
Work and Industries  
Policy

”



## WORKERS' COMPENSATION SNAPSHOT



# RETURN TO WORK



*More than half a million people sustain work-related injury or disease every year in Australia. We have created practical guidance and a step by step template to help small and medium businesses navigate the return to work process*



Corey Grandin, Director,  
Workers' Compensation  
Policy



*This guide and template has been developed in collaboration by BETA (the Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government) and involved rigorous end-user testing. We hope all businesses find it useful for supporting their worker's health and wellbeing while they recover.*



Oliver Granger, Assistant  
Director, Workers'  
Compensation Policy

As part of the [National Return to Work Strategy 2020-2030](#), Safe Work Australia has established a [resource library](#) which holds a wealth of information including research reports, practical tools and jurisdictional resources to support businesses, employers and workers have a positive return to work experience.

The latest workers' compensation guide to be published and shared in our resource library assists with [developing a return to work plan](#). Developing a return to work plan in collaboration with an injured or ill worker is one of the best ways to support their recovery. Research shows workers have poorer health outcomes if they are away from work for a long time, so with the help of a plan they can return to good work, or to stay at work, while they recover. This new guide provides practical advice and a [set-by-step template](#) for developing a successful plan.

# SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED HARASSMENT



In late 2023, Safe Work Australia published the [model Code of Practice: Sexual and gender-based harassment](#).

Sexual and gender-based harassment is harassment or behaviours based on gender or sex that create a risk of harm at work including:

- sexual harassment
- sex- or gender-based harassment and discrimination
- hostile working environments, and
- gendered violence

Sexual and gender-based harassment is a hazard regardless of whether an incident has occurred. Workers may experience stress whenever there is a risk they may be exposed to harassment (e.g. they are afraid of being harassed). Furthermore, the absence of a previous incident should not be taken to mean that the risk has been managed so far as is reasonably practicable.

To have legal effect in a jurisdiction, the model Code of Practice must be approved as a code of practice in that jurisdiction. Check with your WHS regulator to find out if this Code of Practice has legal effect in your jurisdiction.



## WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR A MODEL CODE OF PRACTICE?



*Sexual and gender-based harassment can have a huge impact on workers' physical and mental health. Having policies and training is a start, but not enough to prevent this harm and provide a healthy and safe workplace. To meet their WHS duties, PCBU's need to understand when, where and what tasks increase the risk of sexual harassment, and put in place effective control measures that don't just rely on people following written policies – as this often isn't enough. The model Code steps PCBU's through how to properly understand the risks specific to their individual workplaces and implement the most effective control measures, using strategies such as changing the design of work, to better manage risks. Consultation with workers and their health and safety representatives at each step of the risk management process is essential. This includes when identifying and assessing the risk of sexual and gender-based harassment and making decisions about what control measures to implement to prevent it from occurring.*

*The Respect@Work report demonstrated just how prevalent sexual and gender-based harassment is in Australian workplace. This model Code is relevant to all workplaces.*



Sarah Costelloe, Branch Manager, WHS Framework, Psychosocial and Workers' Compensation Policy





# WELCOME SWA GRADUATES

CLASS OF 2024

Each year Safe Work Australia welcomes highly skilled graduates to our agency. Over 300 applications were received for our 2024 graduate program. To ensure a variety of work in a wide range of policy areas, each graduate will experience 3 placements across different areas of the Agency over a 12-month period and benefit from on the job and structured training.

Many of our graduates remain with the Agency for years, citing job conditions, their team and work diversity as reasons why they have stayed. SWA's graduate program is in the top 10 APS agencies by Prosple – a platform designed to help students discover the next step on their career journey.

Our 2024 cohort started their placements this month, so let's find out a bit more about our newest team members.

Applications for the 2025 graduate program are opening soon. [Visit our website](#) for more information.

“

*Being part of a small agency means I've been able to do meaningful work that has allowed me to appreciate the impact my work has on the Australian public. I'm very proud of that and proud to be part of an Agency working for the 14 million workers we have in Australia.*

”



Kim,  
2022 graduate

“

*Gaining exposure to diverse areas of WHS policy and legislative development across 3 workplace rotations enriched my understanding of WHS matters of national importance.*

”



Jovana,  
2023 graduate

“

*The work is interesting, and forces you to think about directions and perspectives you haven't before.*

”



Pip,  
2022 graduate

## Bayley

**Have you relocated from interstate?**

Yes, all the way from sunny Western Australia!

**What made you choose SWA?**

The tight-knit cohort, sense of professionalism, and even the location were things that made me apply to SWA, and I was ecstatic when I got that call. So far, it's lived up to the hype.

## Guthrie

**Have you relocated from interstate?**

No, I was born and raised in the ACT.

**What made you choose SWA?**

I was looking for stimulating work in Canberra so that I could raise my family close to our support network. During my PhD, I worked with hazardous chemicals and gained a greater appreciation for the importance and complexity of Work Health and Safety.

I chose Safe Work Australia because it is a place where I can apply my scientific skills to promote the safety and wellbeing of millions of Australian workers.

## Trinity

**Have you relocated from interstate?**

No, I grew up in Canberra

**What made you choose SWA?**

The opportunities surrounding policy work at SWA were a big part of my decision. It seemed like a way to apply everything I learnt at Uni about health policy in a novel setting.

## Max

**Have you relocated from interstate?**

Yes, from Adelaide

**What made you choose SWA?**

I chose SWA as the idea of working in a small tight knit agency looked very appealing and interesting.



# DATA UPDATES

Our data analysts have once again been compiling, reviewing, and updating the latest WHS and workers' compensation data, to help deliver insights needed to prevent further deaths and injuries at work. Having launched a stand alone [data website](#) in 2023, we are constantly improving our offerings and the first update of 2024 is to the [preliminary fatalities dashboard](#).

The dashboard shows the estimate of workers fatally injured in Australian workplaces, providing data on the number of deaths that have occurred by industry and now including a breakdown of how the injury was sustained. A 5-year average is also displayed to support comparisons over time.

Data for 2024 on the [preliminary fatalities dashboard](#) is updated fortnightly on [Our Data. Your Stories](#).

## From our community on LinkedIn



**Colleen Wanicek** • 3rd+  
HSEQ Manager @ CEI Services Pty Ltd  
2d • 🌐

Whilst no one likes these statistics, reviewing them and seeing what is causing the most injuries and in what industry really does lead to better practices. Workers receive more education and training and that can only be a good thing. Keep up the great work **Safe Work Australia**  
**#worksafe #bestpractices**  
**#injuries #safetyawareness**  
**#worksmarternotharder**



**Our Data.  
Your Stories.**

[data.safeworkaustralia.gov.au](https://data.safeworkaustralia.gov.au)



## Key findings from the 2023 fatalities data:

**173**

Preliminary worker fatalities

**75**

of these fatalities occurred because of a 'vehicle accident'

**64%**

(111) of these fatalities occurred in 3 of the 19 industries:



Transport, postal and warehousing



Construction

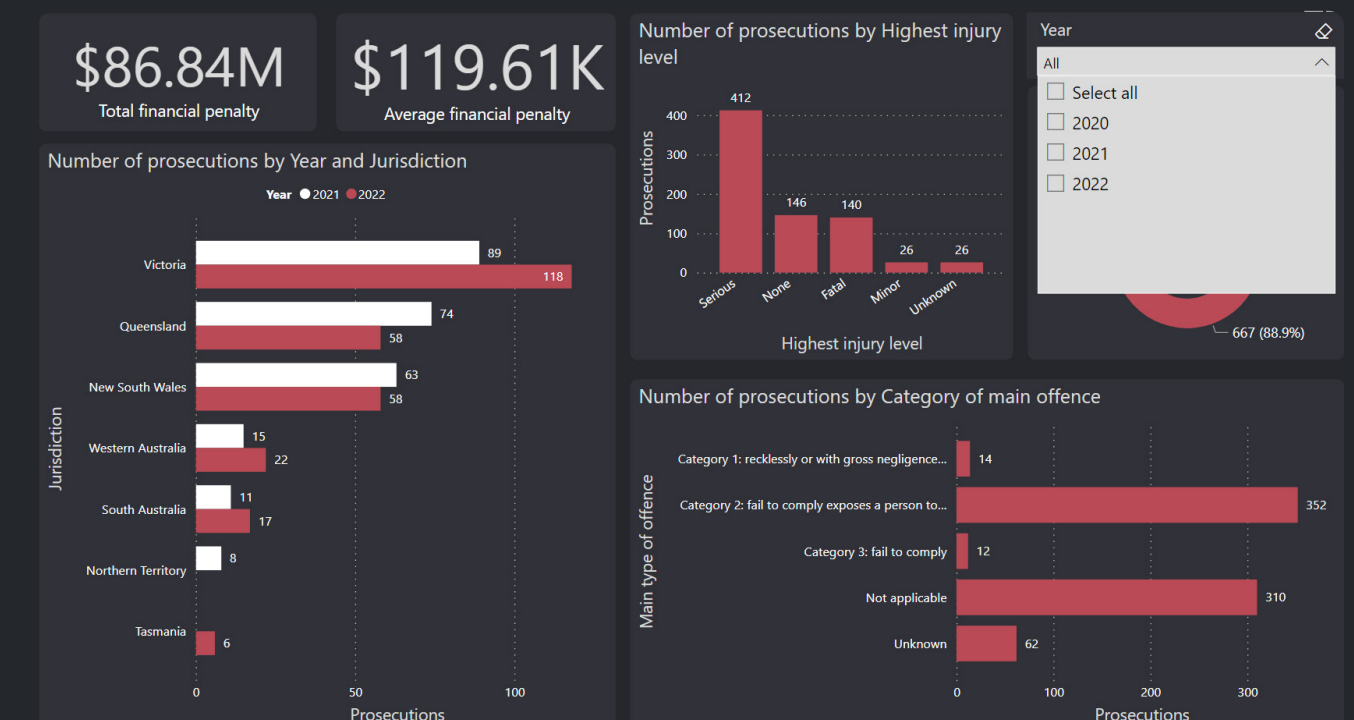


Agriculture, forestry and fishing

# WHS PROSECUTIONS

## WHAT'S HAPPENING ACROSS AUSTRALIA?

The latest publicly available WHS prosecutions data from 2022 has been published on [Our Data. Your Stories](#). The dashboard has been updated to provide national information on criminal prosecutions for breaching WHS laws or regulations since 1 January 2020. The data includes details of cases, sentencing and incidents and is compiled from public reports of WHS prosecutions on available jurisdictions' website.



*I was pleased to see the demand for national prosecutions data. Our new dashboard is one of the most viewed on the [Our data. Your stories](#) website. This shows that people are very interested in the compliance and enforcement aspects of WHS.*



Ren Fisher, Data Analyst,  
Data Improvement and Analysis





# PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE

## Mental health conditions



Of the approximately 10,000 serious mental stress claims in 2021-22p,

# 52.2%

were due to work-related harassment or bullying, and work pressure



### Health care and social assistance

This industry had the **highest number of serious claims** for work-related mental health conditions over the last 5 years. Workers in this industry were among the most likely to experience workplace bullying or work-related violence.

The return to work rate for people with mental health condition claims in 2021 was **79.1%, compared to 91.6% for all injuries**. Workers with mental health condition claims were also more likely to require additional time off work.

Mental health conditions account for an increasing proportion of serious workers' compensation claims and have garnered significant attention in recent years as awareness of their impact on individuals and workplaces has grown. Safe Work Australia has recently published a national picture of [psychological health and safety in the workplace](#), along with an easily digestible [snapshot](#).

The new report uses data from a range of sources including the People at Work Survey, a validated Australian psychosocial risk assessment survey which assesses a number of the most common psychosocial hazards within a workplace. It provides a rich information source about a range of psychosocial risks experienced by Australian workers across different industries and demographics. In this report, we have analysed SWA's workers' compensation data alongside data from the People at Work Survey for the first time, to provide a more detailed understanding of links between work-related psychosocial hazards and mental health conditions.

*Continuing to build the capability of PCBU's, regulators and workers to ensure compliance with the duty to manage psychosocial hazards at work is a key target of the [Australian WHS Strategy 2023-2033](#). Having an accurate picture of the impact of work-related mental health conditions in Australia is an important step in raising awareness and making workplaces healthier and safer. Our new report details both the injuries or conditions that workers sustained and the hazards that frequently cause them.*



Anita Das, Assistant Director,  
Data Improvement and Analysis

## IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

We recently updated the [model Code of Practice on managing risks of plant in the workplace](#).

The guide now includes new advice on the prevention of vehicle roll-aways and safe immobilisation. Vehicle roll-aways – the unintentional movement of a vehicle that has not been properly immobilised – may result in serious injury or fatality. Roll-aways can occur with cars, forklifts, trucks, tractors and trailers, on worksites, car parks, maintenance yards or when a vehicle is parked on the side of the road.



## WELDING FUMES

In January, we updated the Workplace exposure standards for airborne contaminants to reflect WHS ministers' decision to immediately reduce the workplace exposure standard for [welding fumes](#) from an 8-hour time weighted average (TWA) of 5 mg/m<sup>3</sup> to 1 mg/m<sup>3</sup>.

The reduced workplace exposure standard for welding fumes will better protect welders and others who may be exposed to welding fumes at the workplace from developing occupational lung diseases, such as lung cancer.

Contact your work health and safety regulator for information on the implementation of the change to the WES in your jurisdiction.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

### NATIONAL SAFE WORK MONTH 2024

Share your thoughts on this year's National Safe Work Month campaign by completing our [short survey](#)!

Offer your insights on which safety topics we should focus on, what resources you find useful and more! Be sure to complete the survey before it closes on **11 March**.







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Safe Work Australia | Quarterly News Update

# WHY WE'RE HERE

A core function of our work is developing and maintaining an evidence base to inform WHS and workers' compensation policy and practice



**\$28.6b**

The value to the Australian economy each year from reducing work-related injuries and illnesses



**127,800**

Serious workers' compensation claims in 2021-22p



**10 killed**

The preliminary number of Australians killed at work in 2024 to date



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