**Safe Work Australia: Looking ahead**

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We've come to the end of National Safe Work Australia Month and the Australian Strategy Virtual Seminar Series hosted by Safe Work Australia.

I'm Michelle Baxter, the CEO of Safe Work Australia. The national body whose job it is to develop policy to improve work health and safety and workers' compensation arrangements across Australia.

The theme for this year's Safe Work Australia Month has been ‘work safe, home safe’. We know poor work health and safety affects everyone, either directly or indirectly. We want all Australians to be safe at work so we can all return to our families and communities at the end of each and every day.

This virtual seminar series was aimed at you - the audience today and over the last month who have watched the videos and participated in the panel discussions. We were very pleased with the extent of support for this virtual event, and I thank you all. You have shown you care about keeping yourselves, your colleagues or your workers safe and healthy.

Last year, 191 people were killed at work and we estimated 2,000 workers died from occupational illnesses, and each year, thousands more Australians also find their lives temporarily or permanently altered by work related injury or illness. Across Australia the direct and indirect impact of these on families, workplaces and communities was devastating. During the virtual seminar series we heard some of these stories. These were poignant reminders that behind each and every death and injury statistic, there was a real person.

This month we have heard from the Commonwealth Minister, who opened the virtual seminar series, and from leading business people at both the big and the small end of town. Ann Sherry, the Chair of Safe Work Australia, introduced us to the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy. We heard from representatives from industry peak bodies and from union leaders who shared their ideas of what it takes to make good work health and safety happen. We also heard from noted academics who have helped us understand how it all fits together and workers' stories which reminded us again, why it matters.

Leadership and culture was one of the themes for this. The message came through clearly:

* that our community and workplace leaders need to understand the benefits of work health and safety and promote positive organisational cultures,
* that we need workplaces where health and safety is given priority in all work processes and decisions, and
* where leaders foster a culture of active consultation, collaboration and learning.

We heard the vital role leaders play in encouraging workplaces to go beyond just providing the minimum protection, to strive for best practice. It was interesting to hear how leaders come in many forms, from board members to the CEO, from team leaders to the local health and safety representative.

Our speakers explored what good leadership looks like, how to become the kind of leader who makes their workplaces safer. We talked about organisational culture and how organisations evolve and mature to become agile and responsive, how even the smallest business or an individual worker can make a difference, show leadership and make safety matter. To help shape the debate over the year, Safe Work Australia has developed draft leadership principles. We are developing resources to support leaders and provide business with simple and effective tools to measure their performance. Next year, watch out for these on our website.

The Australian Strategy Vision is healthy, safe and productive working lives. We know workplace productivity is critical if business is to succeed and that productivity is at the forefront of the decisions boards and investors make. So we made sure the link between good work health and safety, productivity and business sustainability was strongly emphasised during the virtual seminar series. But we need to better understand how business decisions are made in boardrooms and on the stock market. I would like to thank the business leaders who shared their insights on this with us. This has been an opportunity for those of us in the work health and safety field to glimpse a very different perspective.

Poor work health and safety brings terrible costs to individuals and businesses and conversely, there can be enormous benefits of doing it well. Safe Work Australia is actively supporting work which will translate some of these costs and benefits into dollars and cents to help community and business appreciate them. We know what gets noticed by business leaders and investors so it's important for them to have accurate and timely information about the work health and safety performance in their organisations.

During the virtual seminar series you heard about our collaboration with Macquarie University and the Chartered Professional Accountants on how companies can improve the quality and consistency of the information about their work health and safety performance which they include in their annual reports. This is important because this allows the community and investors to know which workplaces are managing some of the most critical business risks - their people's safety.

We hope the discussions we began this month will form the start of an ongoing conversation among business leaders and in the community more broadly about how investing in work health and safety, investing your capital, your time and your human resources can result in more productive Australian businesses.

Responsive and effective regulation is another Australian strategy action area, and has been an important theme during the virtual seminar series. To help protect working Australians we need an effective legislative framework, one which clearly describes what the Australian government and the community expects will be the minimum health and safety protections when they are at work.

There is, and always will be, an important role for regulation and regulators in work health and safety but it needs to be responsive and proportionate. Regulators have a choice of tools they can use to help businesses become safer and healthier. How do they choose which to use and when? During the VSS, we heard a variety of different perspectives on that question. Professor Johnstone reflected on Australia's recent and ongoing journey to build a legislative framework which is both effective in protecting workers and adequately responds to the changing nature of work and business pressures. Safe Work Australia members also reflected on what they are doing to support businesses meet their obligations.

So what does the future hold for Safe Work Australia? Safe Work Australia has an ongoing role at a national level to engage with stakeholders on a range of national policy issues. It also has a strong identity as a source of national work health and safety and workers' compensation data and research. For example, Safe Work Australia developed and maintains the Traumatic Injury Fatalities Data Set which provides the most comprehensive data available on fatalities due to injuries sustained at work. The Notifiable Fatalities Collection is the timeliest source of fatalities data with national figures compiled monthly.

In the last few years, Safe Work Australia members have focused on developing nationally consistent work health and safety laws. This huge task was completed through a robust collaborative tripartite process and provides, for the first time, an integrated legislative framework for adoption across Australia.

It consists of:

* a Model Work Health Safety Act supported by Model Regulations,
* Codes of Practice,
* Guidance and a National Compliance and Enforcement Policy.

The majority of Australian workers are now covered by these laws. We will continue to monitor, review and evaluate the implementation of the Model Work Health Safety laws. We will suggest changes to improve their efficiency, reduce regulatory burden and support ongoing reform to improve outcomes for all workers and businesses.

Safe Work Australia is also developing policy proposals to improve the consistency of explosives’ legislation across Australia. We will continue our current strong focus on ensuring that the guidance we produce is relevant to small business and is accessible, simpler and easier for everyone to understand.

We will continue our work to explore how we can improve consistency in workers' compensation arrangements across Australia and identify possible areas for improvement. We are working to reconsider the diseases typically included as part of workers' compensation systems that are deemed to be work related. This has the important effect to reverse the onus of proof for some diseases. You may have heard of this approach for firefighters.

We are also currently implementing a nationally co‑ordinated approach to the assessment of permanent impairment which results from workplace incidents. To inform our own and others' work, we will continue to collect data and undertake research to ensure all Australians have access to independent national data on how many, where and why Australians are being hurt or made ill by work. We will keep exploring what the new risks might be in the next decade and what might need to be done to ensure these are managed.

To learn and share best practice, we will continue to liaise and collaborate with countries overseas and international organisations. And over the next 12 months we will focus on selected action areas in the Australian Strategy, including how work health and safety can be improved by eliminating or minimising hazards through good design, how supply chains and networks can be used to drive improvements and strengthening work health and safety skills and knowledge.

In our 2014-15 Operational Plan, we have committed to pay particular attention to the priority industries of manufacturing and construction. These both play an important role in our economy but also have particular work health and safety challenges.

As we reach the end of the Virtual Seminar Series, I would again, like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who logged on, listened or watched these events. Recently, the Australian Government challenged the public service to be more innovative and to use the technology we now have available to reach more Australians.

I chose to hold this event as a virtual seminar series so that by using technology, we could make the information more accessible to a diverse group of participants. We wanted to reach more people than could attend just a single event in just one city and one State, to reach into your workplaces or homes to involve you in the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy. And because you can go back, download the resources, watch some of it again or share it, we hope the material on this site will have a more lasting impact than a single experience.

I'm committed to making our information and online services accessible to as many people as possible. Online accessibility not only helps people who are vision impaired, it assists those with reduced hearing, cognitive and motor abilities. All our video presentations, both live and pre‑recorded have closed captioning and a full transcript provided.

I hope you found the format both entertaining and informative, and if you've liked the way we've presented this information or have suggestions on how we could do it better next time, please give us your feedback. We're keen to know what your view is, so please log onto the website and tell us what you think.

We've come a long way since the times when death, injury or illnesses were seen as just a normal part of earning a living. We have better science and knowledge to guide us, better tools and systems to keep us safe, and as more and more businesses factor their workers' health and safety into their bottom line, we will continue to improve because ethically and economically there is just no alternative, and we are seeing results. Together, let's keep up the momentum.

We hope you've enjoyed the Safe Work Australia Seminar Series.

Thank you.

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