

# RESEARCH BRIEF

## Work Health and Safety Perceptions: Construction Industry



### The Study

The construction industry has been designated as a priority industry in the Australian Strategy due to the high number and rate of work-related injuries and illnesses. The construction industry has consistently been among the top few industries with the highest number of serious claims and has had the fifth highest incidence rate of serious claims of all industries since 2006-07. The construction industry also has inherent hazards due to the nature of the work.

This profile is one of a series produced by Safe Work Australia on priority industries.

### Main findings

#### Work-related injuries

The most common work-related injuries experienced by workers in the construction industry were cuts and open wounds (31%), sprains and strains (21%) and chronic joint or muscle conditions (16%). Work-related injuries experienced in the industry were mainly due to hitting or being hit by an object (31%), lifting, pushing or pulling objects (30%) and falls from height (15%).

Almost three quarters of employers felt that the worker being careless was the main cause of work-related injury in the industry, followed by just not thinking and manual tasks (38% each). While workers echoed the worker being careless as the main cause of work-related injury in the industry (42%) and not thinking (32%) as main causes of injury, one third felt a lack of education and training was also a main cause.

#### Disease-causing hazard exposure

Construction workers were most commonly exposed to airborne dust and fumes (69%), vibration (55%) and loud noise (53%) in their workplace. Those exposed to loud noise reported the highest levels of control measures (e.g. personal protective equipment), while almost one quarter of workers exposed to vibration were not provided with any control measures.

#### Work health and safety practices

##### Compliance activities

The top six compliance activities undertaken by construction employers were:

- The provision of protective clothing or equipment
- Identification of safety issues
- Talking with workers (including contractors)
- Implementing safety measures
- Talking with other businesses, and
- Running toolbox sessions.

Greater proportions of construction employers undertook these compliance activities compared to the other priority industries, particularly talking with other businesses (70% compared to 28%) and running toolbox sessions (64% compared to 19%).

#### Work health and safety training

Construction employers provided the lowest proportion of training to their workers during the past 12 months, with almost two thirds indicating that they provided some training (61%) compared to 75% for the other priority industries.

One quarter of construction workers indicated that they received no health and safety training over the 12 month period, which was lower than indicated by employers.

#### Work health and safety information

Almost half of construction employers got their work health and safety information from employer or industry associations, followed by industry pamphlets and newsletters (41%), Health and Safety Representatives (37%) and Government Health and Safety Inspectorates (23%). For workers, the main sources of information were training courses (48%), meetings at work (33%) and supervisors and managers (28%).

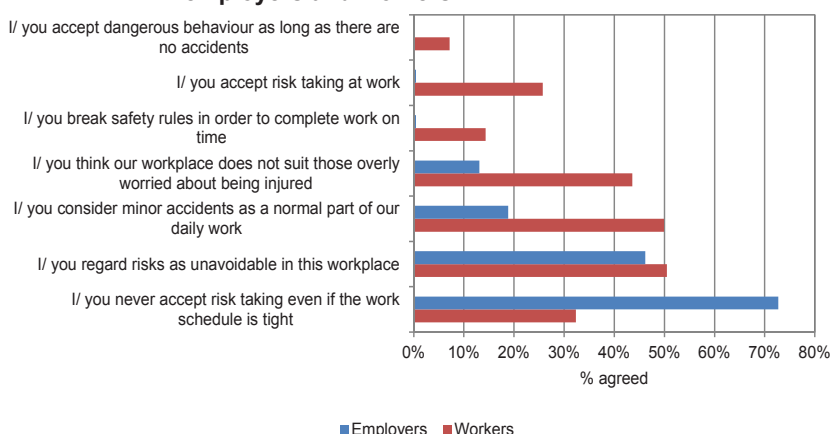
#### Work health and safety motivations, attitudes and perceptions

Management motivations for ensuring safety within construction workplaces focused on feelings of responsibility for staff, doing the right thing as well as reduced absenteeism, increased worker productivity and reduced costs.

Construction employers and workers had high levels of agreement with statements regarding their confidence in their work health and safety knowledge, that they have thought about and taken on board safety issues in the workplace and that they can solve most health and safety issues if they try hard enough.

Figure 1 shows that while 73% of employers agreed that they would never accept risk taking if the work schedule was tight, only 32% of workers agreed. This indicates that more just over 60% of workers accept risk taking when the work schedule is tight. One quarter of workers agreed that they accept risk taking at work, while one in 10 employees agreed that they would break safety rules to complete work on time.

**Figure 1: Agreement with risk taking statements for construction employers and workers**



Further information can be found in a detailed report available on the [Safe Work Australia website](#).