

The issue

The transport industry is a priority industry for the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012–2022 due to its high rate of work-related injury and illness. While some information on the industry's work health and safety performance is available, there is a lack of information on exposures to occupational health hazards and work health and safety practices and perceptions among workers and employers in the Australian transport industry.

The Study

We analysed data on the transport industry from six quantitative surveys conducted between 2000 and 2014. Three of the surveys collected data from workers, and three collected data from employers. We also examined findings from a 2009 evaluation of a WHS intervention campaign in the transport industry.

Main Findings

Kinds of work related injuries and illnesses

The most frequent work related injuries and illnesses reported by transport industry workers were sprains and strains (42.9%) and chronic joint or muscle conditions (25.8%). The comparable rates for workers in other industries were 28% and 16% respectively

Hazard exposures

Workers in the transport industry were more likely to report being exposed to airborne hazards such as gasses and fumes, sun and vibration than workers in other industries.

Effectiveness of consultation

The findings suggest that workers see WHS consultation processes in the industry as less effective than managers. About 90% of employers agree that the business:

- considers workers' suggestions regarding safety (compared to about 75% of workers)
- gives workers the opportunity to express their views about WHS matters (compared to about 80% of workers)
- involves workers when proposing changes that may affect their health and safety (compared to about 70% of workers), and
- involves workers in decisions about WHS (compared to about 70% of workers.)

Risk taking

Transport industry employers differed from employers in other priority and non-priority industries in their acceptance of risk taking with:

- 20% agreeing they break safety rules to complete work on time compared with about 6% in all other industries, and
- 20% agreeing they consider minor accidents a normal part of daily work compared with 10% or less in all other industries.

Transport industry workers and employers differed considerably in their acceptance of risk taking behaviour:

- 45% of workers agreed that risks are unavoidable while only about 15% of employers agreed, and
- 40% of employers agreed that our workplace does not suit those overly concerned about being injured while only about 20% of workers.

Rule Breaking

Transport industry employers also differed from employers in other industries in their acceptance of rule breaking.

Transport industry employers agreed that:

- workers bend the rules to achieve a target (21%), and
- workers ignore safety rules to get the job done (31%).

Only about 5-6% of employers in other priority and non-priority industries agreed with these statements.

Transport industry employers and workers differed considerably in their acceptance of rule breaking. About 30% of employers agreed that workers:

- ignore safety rules to get the job done compared to 6% of workers.
- see conditions at the workplace as stopping them from following safety rules compared to 17% of workers.

A more detailed report on these findings is available at www.swa.gov.au.

Figure 1. Agreement with risk taking statements by industry (employers)

