

The issue

The manufacturing industry is a priority industry for the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 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 manufacturing industry.

The Study

We analysed data on manufacturing from seven quantitative surveys conducted between 2000 and 2013. Three of the surveys collected data from workers, one involved CEOs and three collected data from businesses. We also examined findings from a 2013 qualitative study in owners/ managers of structural metal product manufacturing businesses.

Main Findings

The most common self-reported exposures in the industry were exposure to airborne hazards, noise and vibration.

According to both employers and workers, most manufacturing workplaces frequently undertake a wide range of work health and safety activities (Figure 1). These activities are undertaken at a higher rate in manufacturing workplaces than workplaces in other priority industries.

It appears that small manufacturing businesses are as likely as large businesses to undertake some health and safety activities like providing personal protective equipment (PPE). But they also appear less likely to put in place safety measures, provide training or talk about WHS matters with workers, including contractors.

About 87% of manufacturing employers provided some health and safety training to their workers over a 12 month period (vs. 71% in other priority industries). A similar proportion provided induction training to new workers.

One in five manufacturing employers may accept risk taking if the schedule is tight. One in five employers believes that the time it takes before safety improvements are implemented is too long.

Key Messages

Although most in manufacturing are undertaking health and safety activities, there is room for improvement. For example, 20% of manufacturing businesses did not identify safety issues in 2012.

Increased capacity and support for small businesses to provide health and safety training and to undertake other compliance activities is needed.

Time pressures and the view that some risks are unavoidable may be barriers to work health and safety in this industry.

An executive summary and the full report which this brief is drawn from can be found on Safe Work Australia website.

Figure 1. The proportion of employers and workers in the manufacturing industry who say work health and safety activities are undertaken all or most of the time

