



the work health and safety monitor

keeping all with an interest in OHS informed of developments in occupational health and safety nationally and internationally

Issue 3 Vol 17 August 2013



Occupational Health Society on the move

Two working groups of members of the Society came together on 15 August at Technology Park, Bentley, to discuss seminar activities on topics previously identified as priority issues warranting urgent attention on occupational health grounds.

The topics are:

Long Duration Workers' Compensation Claims

The health benefits of safe working environments are well documented and it is recognised that being off work is bad for a worker's health. Returning to work promptly, aids injury recovery.

The working group has identified a number of possible reasons for the increase in long duration claims incidence and length of time away from work. Although no specific interest group was seen as responsible for the worsening situation, it was generally agreed that 'return-to-work' should be the focus of a proposed seminar.

WorkCover WA and the Institute for Safety Compensation and Recovery Research based at Monash University, Victoria, where extensive research is regularly conducted, will both be invited to participate. As well, representatives from all specific interest groups will be approached.

It is intended to conduct the seminar in October.

Psychological Diseases in the Workplace

The increasing incidence of mental health diseases in Australian workplaces has been documented by SafeWork Australia, which predicts that by 2020, stress-related illnesses such as depression and cardiovascular disease will be the leading cause of the global disease problem. Psychological injury claims are steadily increasing and incur the largest proportion of expense in relation to workers' compensation claims.

This concern has been echoed by the Australian Public Service Commission and Comcare and also by the National Mental Health Commission.

The working group has identified a number of matters for consideration at a seminar proposed for November. It will invite participation from all related disciplines with a view to educating all parties in the workplace about the scope and extent of psychological diseases and the availability of support services to assist with their treatment and management.

WELCOME

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As a Registered Training Organisation, MARCSTA delivers occupational safety and health units of competency for the following national training packages:

- Transport and Logistics
- Business Services
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Applications for recognition of prior learning may be lodged for all training programs.

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OHS legislative/ regulatory matters



HARMONISED LEGISLATION - NEW TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR EMPLOYERS

In Queensland, a Brisbane roofing contractor has been ordered to undergo job training by a magistrate after pleading guilty to failing to comply with a direction from a workplace health and safety inspector to cease work on a roof until fall protection was in place.

The order, under the wider sentencing options of the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 now available, was the first to include a training component.

The head of Workplace Health and Safety, Queensland, Dr Simon Blackwood, said that the case showed how the new legislation is not just about fines.

Source: eSAFE Newsletter 21 June 2013

Anti-bullying applications expected to increase

The Fair Work Commission anticipates a steep rise in the number of applications under the new anti-bullying provisions of the Fair Work Act.

Its General Manager, Bernadette O'Neil, told the Senate Estimates Committee that, based on data available on workplace bullying rates, it expects to receive 3,500 applications per year.

The provisions take effect from January 2014. How effective this switch to the industrial relations approach will be for affected workers is questionable given the intimidatory process under the Fair Work legislation.

The period for public comment on SafeWork Australia's latest draft Code of Practice for Preventing and Responding to Workplace Bullying has now passed and it will be interesting to see what, if any, changes will be made following the input by employer organisations who, for the most part, have expressed reservations.

Available submissions are accessible online.

Source: ohsalert 11 June 2013

How to Determine What is Reasonably Practicable to Meet a Health and Safety Duty

HOW TO DETERMINE WHAT IS REASONABLY PRACTICABLE TO MEET A HEALTH AND SAFETY DUTY

MAY 2013

SafeWork Australia has released a new guide designed to help persons conducting business operations (PCBUs) to comply with their duty to do what is 'reasonably practicable' to ensure health and safety in the workplace.

Importantly, the guide explains how much weight employers can place on costs when deciding whether or not to adopt a hazard control.

Source: SafeWork Australia <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/SWA/about/Publications/Documents/774/Guide-Reasonably-Practicable.pdf>



WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY

Picture copyright Ozminerals

NSW passes harmonised mine health and safety legislation

The introduction of the Work Health and Safety (Mines) Bill 2013 was the final step in NSW's implementation of harmonised WHS laws.

The Bill which was assented to on 1 July 2013 replaces the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act and the Mine Health and Safety Act, while maintaining the existing enforcement powers for inspections and investigations contained in these laws.

Industry safety and health representatives and site-specific safety and health representatives will supplement existing work health and safety worker representatives.

Supreme Court decision limits OHS knowledge availability

A recent decision by the Queensland Supreme Court regarding public knowledge of the OHS breaches by tenderers and contractors is expected to be appealed by Work Health and Safety Queensland.

The decision, which limits access to important information on health and safety offenders in Queensland, may stop the OHS regulator in Queensland from listing the names of offenders on its website. This will limit access to important information on the OHS credentials of tenderers and contractors.

Source: *SafetyAtWorkBlog* 23 May 2013

OHS and workers' compensation laws need amendment for older workers

The Australian Law Reform Commission has made a number of OHS and workers' compensation related recommendations aimed at keeping mature-age workers in the workforce for longer, including extending incapacity payment periods.

Among the recommendations:

SafeWork Australia, in implementing the National Strategy 2012-2022 and other work plans, should consider the health and safety issues affecting mature-age workers particularly in the improvement of the design of structures, plant, substances, work and work systems.

The keystone recommendation is a national participation plan to provide a co-ordinated response to address barriers to participating by mature age people in the Australian labour market.

Source: *Australian Law Reform Commission Media Release* 30 May 2013

ACT WorkSafe inspections

WorkSafe inspectors in the ACT will start issuing on-the-spot fines of around \$3,000 for safety breaches in the construction industry following a damning 2012 report which found that the ACT's serious injury rate in that sector was 31% higher than the national average.

SAFETY



WorkSafe WA operational priority areas

WorkSafe WA has identified priority areas which will be targeted for enforcement and compliance activities in order to reduce the occurrence of work-related injuries and promote safe work practices.

The current areas:

- electricity
- falls from heights
- slips and trips
- body stressing (or manual tasks)
- mobile plant
- machine guarding, and
- hazardous substances.

Relevant information and statistics are provided in WorkSafe's priority summary.

Source: Department of Commerce

Invalid high risk work licences warning

WorkSafe WA has issued a further warning to employers on the need to carefully check high risk work licences after receiving information on their availability from overseas.

The Commissioner says that fraudulent licences can be obtained overseas quickly and at low cost in places such as Thailand. Western Australian licences can be verified on the home page of the WorkSafe website and other Australian locations verified with the relevant authority in the State or Territory of issue.

Source: WorkSafe WA OSH Update 14 May 2013

US MINING INDUSTRY CONTINUES TO REDUCE DEATHS AND INJURIES IN THE WORKFORCE

Final data for 2012 released by MSHA indicates that the lowest fatality and injury rates in the history of US mining occurred in 2012.

In coal mining 20 miners died, the second lowest level ever recorded and the rate of reported injuries was the lowest ever recorded. (Number of employees 137,650. Fatality incidence rate per 1,000 employees was 0.145.)

In metal and non-metal mining 16 miners died equalling the record low set in 2011 and the reported injury rate was also a record low (Number of employees 250,228. Fatality incidence rate was 0.064)

The Western Australian fatality incidence rate in mining has been about half that of the USA for the past four years.

Source: MSHA Media Release 13-326-NAT

NON-COMPLIANCE

WORKERS PUNISHED FOR NON-COMPLIANCE WITH COMPANY SAFETY POLICY

The Fair Work Commission has upheld a decision by an employer to dismiss a bus driver for using a mobile phone while in control of a bus, breaching the employer's mobile phone use policy.

The Deputy President found the employee's act was a risk to the safety of himself, passengers and other road users and, in so doing, put the reputation, viability or profitability of the employer's business at risk of compromise.

Source: ohs alert June 2013

In another case the Fair Work Commission found that a worker who was dismissed for tampering with noise monitoring equipment during quarry blasts had breached safety regulations and 'affected his company's abilities to operate safely and within environmental constraints'. His unfair dismissal claim was rejected.

Source: ohs alert June 2013

In yet another case, a bakery worker was cleaning a bread divider with his head and one arm inside the hopper while the machine, although turned off, was not locked or tagged out as required by the company's regulations. He was rightly dismissed as he had breached the employer's safety policy and his actions constituted serious misconduct.

Commissioner Cloghan said it was open to the employer to conclude that it could not trust the worker to conduct his duties in a safe manner and the decision to dismiss him was sound and defensible.

Source: ohs alert May 2013

WA employer fined for hi-vis clothing and forklift breaches

A Western Australian employer has been fined \$20,000 for failing to maintain a safe work environment, after a worker in black clothing was run over by a forklift being reversed by an unlicensed manager.

The Court found that the employer did not have policies requiring exclusion zones or other methods to separate pedestrians and forklifts, and did not supply workers with hi-vis clothing or require such clothing to be worn.

The company lacked policies requiring fork lift operators to drive at safe speeds, sound horns before reversing or conduct regular pre-start checks.

Further, the depot manager did not have the appropriate high risk licence required to operate the forklift and had received little training when he was engaged as the manager.

Source: ohs alert 13 June 2013



Even low levels of air pollution can increase risk of cancer and heart disease

Two studies published recently in the journal, *Lancet Oncology*, have raised concerns about air pollution at current concentrations.

Scientists behind the two studies say that their findings indicate that current safety limits on air pollution are still too high and need to be lowered.

Long term exposure to microscopic particles of soot at levels similar to those found in suburban areas of Britain can increase lung cancer by up to 36 per cent. The short term impact also increased the risk of being admitted to hospital or dying from heart failure by 2 per cent.

Professor Jon Ayres, an expert in respiratory medicine at the University of Birmingham, said that "there is now no doubt that fine particles are a cause of lung cancer. Air pollution contributes to lung cancer through long and short term exposure and there is no doubt that reducing air pollution will reduce the burden of heart disease".

The UK's official air pollution watchdog estimates that around 29,000 die as a result of air pollution each year, but that figure may need to be revised following the new research.

Source: UK Telegraph 9 July 2013

Diesel fumes pose a particular risk for diabetics

A two-year UAE-based experimental study looked at mice with genetically induced diabetes who were exposed to doses of diesel exhaust particles comparable to human exposure. The study concluded that exposure to diesel fumes for even a few hours is putting diabetics at a higher risk of developing respiratory and cardiovascular disease.

The study leader, Professor Abderrahim Nemmar, says that inhaled nano-sized particles can penetrate deeply into the respiratory tract, pass into the systematic circulation and reach various organs.

He suggested that doctors should advise diabetic patients to avoid peak traffic hours and extreme heat. He added that face masks can be worn but even then these nano-particles get through.

Source: Khaleej Times 11 July 2013

Diesel program slashed

In a program in the USA, more than 50,000 high-polluting diesel engines have been cleaned up or removed from US roads in a federal program designed to reduce smog and greenhouse gases. Industry and environmental officials have called it a landmark success, but it is now threatened by the Obama administration's new budget.

Allen Schaeffer, the executive director of the Diesel Technology Forum, says that there are not too many government programs investing in energy efficiency and human health that can demonstrate success.

A 2005 report from the Clean Air Task Force estimated diesel fumes are responsible for about 21,000 premature deaths in the US per year.

About 45 million people live within 100 metres of a freeway in the US, according to the EPA.

Source: environmentalhealthnews 1 May 2013 **AUGUST 2013 / MONITOR / 7**

HEALTH

Musculoskeletal disorders in the European community

The scale of work-induced musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) has been clear for over 20 years. It tops the tables of national statistics on recognised occupational diseases. The prevalence of such MSDs in the population is a function of working conditions and risk factors that demand a policy of prevention. The record of preventive actions in most EU countries, however, is very poor.

Three of the four main disease groups in the Dublin Foundation's European Working Conditions survey are MSD related.

Backache is suffered by 47% of female and 46% of male workers; neck ache and upper limb pain affect 45% of women and 41% of male workers; while lower limb pain is experienced by 30% of women and men alike.

The effects of MSDs build up over and beyond working life. They are a factor in forcing many workers out of their jobs, impair the quality of life of older people and can lead to an increased death rate from the long-term consequences of inflammatory diseases.

Source: HESA Mag #07 2013

Good practice in workplace alcohol and other drugs problems

A paper prepared recently for the Australian Drug Foundation reports that alcohol is responsible for 5 per cent of all workplace deaths and up to 11 per cent of non-fatal injuries.

The Foundation's Head of Workplace Services, Phillip Collins, said that the annual cost of absenteeism due to alcohol alone is estimated at up to \$1.2 billion, adding that the costs of lost productivity or absenteeism due to alcohol and other drugs are generally well hidden because employers simply don't have enough information to attribute the days of work their staff are missing as being due to drug or alcohol use.

The paper provides some useful, if not new, recommendations for employers to address the problem.

Source: safetysolutions July 2013

New technologies undermining worker well-being

Surveys carried out by Dutch and Belgium trade unions have produced similar findings – that communication tools (smart phones, laptops etc.) are blurring the dividing line between work and personal time.

Sixty per cent of respondents had to be contactable during their free time or when travelling between home and work and 68 per cent regarded electronic communication tools as stressors during working hours.

Workers were also polled on the physical risks of using these devices with 23 per cent claiming to suffer from painful hands, wrists, fingers, neck, shoulders or arms. Sixty two per cent thought that their health 'may well be' at risk.

Importantly, only nine per cent thought that their employers had carried out a specific risk analysis associated with the new technologies.

Source: etui 23 May 2013

Report identifies lead contamination of children in Mt Isa

The Environmental Science Research Group at Macquarie University, NSW, has found that emissions from the Glencore Xstrata Mine at Mt Isa are directly linked to lead contamination in local children.

The lead researcher, Professor Mark Taylor, says that the evidence that emissions are reaching the town and are the source and cause of lead found in the urban area of Mt Isa is compelling. For the city's youngest, that raises serious health issues about exposure to the heavy metal lead.

Professor Taylor says that remediation strategies should target the urban lead pollution and ongoing sources of environmental lead to mitigate the problems of exposure in Mt Isa.

Source: Mackay, A.K., et al., Identification of environmental lead sources and pathways in a mining and smelting town: Mount Isa, Australia, Environmental Pollution (2013), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.envpl.2013.05.007>



FATIGUE/SLEEP

CATERPILLAR COMBATS DRIVER FATIGUE

Caterpillar, the world's biggest mining equipment maker, is to sell a package of sensors, alarms and software which detect when a truck driver is about to fall asleep.

The eye and face tracking technology aims to prevent accidents caused by fatigue.

Caterpillar believes that the package out-performs earlier systems that needed workers to wear special equipment.

The product was developed by Australian firm, Seeing Machines, which was selected after a panel of experts chose it over 21 rival technologies.

It will cost up to US\$20,000 to install on each vehicle, although a discount applies if it is bought in bulk.

The package, termed Driver Safety Solutions (DSS) uses a camera to detect a driver's pupil size, how frequently they blink, and how long they keep their eyes shut. In addition it tracks where the user's mouth is in order to work out when the workers are not looking at the road.

To help identify these features truck cabs are also fitted with an infrared lamp. Its light is invisible to humans, but allows the camera to see in the dark and through employees' safety glasses.

An accelerometer and GPS chip are also installed to confirm the truck is being driven at the time, and the data is processed by a computer mounted behind the driver's seat which is designed to cope with strong vibrations and dust.

The aim is to detect the onset of micro-sleep - periods when a person passes out for anywhere from a fraction of a second to up to half a minute, and then wakes up again without realising they lost consciousness.

Caterpillar says tiredness is one of the biggest causes of accidents in the mining industry.

If the computer's software believes this has occurred it triggers an audio alarm and vibrates a motor built into the driver's seat to rouse them.

An alert is also sent back to the miner's support staff who can view a streamed video feed of the driver's eyes and view data about their recent behaviour.

"Dependent on the organisation's fatigue mitigation policy, they will then decide what to do with the driver," explained Ken Kroeger, chief executive of Seeing Machines.

According to Caterpillar's own data, operator fatigue was a factor in 65% of truck haulage accidents in 2007.

Source: BBC Technology 28 May 2013

Young drivers and the risk for drowsy driving

In an article recently published in *JAMA Pediatrics*, researchers have concluded that less sleep per night significantly increased the risk of crash for young drivers. Less sleep on weekend nights increased the risk for run-off-road crashes occurring in the late-night hours.

They said that these findings provided a rationale for governments and health care providers to address sleep-related crashes among young drivers.

Participants in the study were 20,822 newly licensed drivers aged 17-24 years.

Source: JAMA network 20 May 2013



PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

Old and inexpensive drug lowers suicide risk

A new review of data conducted by researchers at Oxford University who analysed the results of 48 clinical trials involving more than 6,600 people has found that the drug Lithium was linked with a 60 per cent reduction in the risk of suicide and other causes of death. It may also reduce the risk of self-harm in people with mood disorders.

How the drug works to cut suicide risk is unclear.

Lithium may reduce relapses of mood disorders but there is also 'some evidence that lithium decreases aggression and possibly impulsivity which might be another mechanism mediating the anti-suicidal effect' the researchers said.

Source: MedicineNet 27 June 2013

Women and depression

Depression is much more common in women than in men, but the reason for this female predominance is unclear.

Besides this fact, women tend to develop depression at an earlier stage and have depressive episodes that last longer and tend to recur more often.

Many more women would probably seek treatment if they realised what the symptoms of depression are. Irritability, loss of interest in usual activities, social isolation, insomnia, loss of energy or problems concentrating, and either weight loss or gain can be symptoms of depression. Depression may not show itself solely by tearfulness or sadness.

Source: MedicineNet June 2013

The link between drugs and mental health in young people

Researchers at the University of Sydney's Brain and Mind Research Institute have reported findings of a study looking at how many young people with mental health problems were using cannabis and alcohol.

Their study focussed on young people aged 21/22 seeking mental health care from centres which specialised in the assessment and early intervention of mental health problems. Overall, 12 per cent of those aged between 12-17 were drinking alcohol on a weekly basis and 7 per cent were using cannabis at least once a week.

Professor Patrick McGorry from the University of Melbourne says that the link between drugs and mental ill health is a two-way street. One the one hand, mental ill health such as anxiety, depression and stress can drive young people to self-medicate to relieve those feelings but once a young person starts using these substances, they can also create mental problems in their own right.

The Director of the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, Professor Michael Farrell, is particularly concerned about the growing prevalence of binge drinking and also about methamphetamine usage which he associates with high levels of psychosis.

Source: ABC Health and Wellbeing 27 June 2013

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression closely linked

A new study that corroborates previous findings that those persons who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder also suffer from depression has been carried out by researchers at Case Western Reserve University, USA.

The findings show the need to routinely assess patients for both depression and PTSD, the study authors said.

Source: *MedicineNet* 4 June 2013

Daily gene rhythms may be off in depressed people

Researchers say their research findings shed new light on what goes wrong in the brain when depression strikes.

Scientists have been aware that gene activity in animals' brains follows a circadian pattern but whether that is true for the human brain has always been in question.

Researchers at the University of Michigan studied the autopsied brain tissue from 89 people who had died at different times of the day so that they could look at each person's gene activity at the time of death and search for differences in individuals.

Hundreds of genes emerged as having a rhythm based on the time of day. That rhythm was clear in the brain tissue from people with no history of psychiatric disorders and the researchers were able to look at an individual's gene activity and correctly guess that person's time of death within an hour.

However, they were unable to do that for those individuals who were suffering from major depression at the time of death – their gene activity was too varied.

The researchers concluded that a disruption in the brain's daily gene activity exists in depression. The big unknown was whether out-of-sync brain genes are the initial cause of depression or a result of the disorder.

Professor Huda Akil said that currently, anti-depressant drugs target certain chemicals in the brain believed to contribute to depression, most famously, the mood regulating chemical serotonin. However, there are multiple things going wrong in the brain when a person has major depression. She said that it is not simply a serotonin imbalance.

Source: *MedicineNet* 13 May 2013

STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES ARE BECOMING A MAJOR CONCERN FOR CANADIAN WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS

A recent survey shows more than one in five Canadian employees report they are currently suffering depression, while another 16 per cent say that they have experienced depression in the past.

Another survey reveals 71 per cent of Canadian employees have varying degrees of concern about the level of psychological health and safety in their workplace.

Fourteen percent say their workplace is not psychologically healthy and safe.

Mike Schwartz, vice-president of group benefits at Winnipeg-based Great-West Life, says 30% of long-term disability cases across the insurance industry are primarily related to mental health and mental health issues are also responsible for increasing absenteeism and presenteeism among workers.

Employers are recognising that psychological health and safety is as important to the bottom line as the physical health and safety of the workers.

Key findings:

Managers who are not equipped with knowledge and training to effectively deal with mental health problems that arise in the workplace are doomed to fail.

Without proper training and knowledge they will continue to fail employees suffering from mental illness.

What is emerging now is that emotional intelligence as a competency for managers is crucial.

The skill areas where respondents experience the most challenges in working with distressed employees are:

- communicating effectively
- understanding their own emotional reactions.

Source: *Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace* April 2013



TRAINING

NEW WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO OHS AND EDUCATION IN EUROPE

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work has released a new report which looks at the whole school approach to OHS and education.

The report discusses the inclusion of risk education and school safety management in a broader, combined approach which covers topics such as health education and promotion, the prevention of violence to and bullying of staff and pupils, and sustainable development and environmental issues.

Source: osha.europa 15 May 2013

Interpersonal skills learning needed in OHS degree programs

In a study conducted by researchers at the Arizona State University that surveyed 151 safety professionals and evaluated 181 degree programs, it was found that more than 60 per cent of those surveyed said that their OHS program did not require any interpersonal communication related courses.

Only nine per cent said that their OHS program required at least one interpersonal related course.

The majority felt that their interpersonal skills evolved as they increased their experience.

Fifty-seven per cent said they did not feel well prepared on graduation but they do now.

One of the lead researchers, Frederike Doesting, said that the findings indicate the importance for those running safety, health and environmental degree programs to evaluate the need and feasibility of requiring a formal interpersonal related course or at least encouraging one as an elective.





WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Failure to undertake return-to-work plans a valid reason for dismissal

An employee of the St Vincent de Paul Sydney Archdiocese who was dismissed for refusing to 'constructively participate' in the return-to-work process has had her unfair dismissal claim rejected.

The worker, who sprained her ankle at work, was awarded workers' compensation for the injury and assessed as unfit for duties and took leave between January and August 2012.

In that time the worker was offered two return-to-work options which she failed to respond to.

The employer then suggested an injury management plan with similar requirements which the worker rejected.

The employer argued that the worker was fit for duties but failed to make an effort to return to work or to provide any reasonable explanation for not returning.

Source: ohs alert 27 May 2013

Suspected workers' compensation fraud in Queensland

Queensland's self-insured employers have been reminded that where 'injured' workers lodge fraudulent compensation claims they must be reported to the statutory authority. There have been a number of employees of self-insured employers who have been found guilty of fraud over the last year.

Source: ohs alert 23 May 2013

Sustained bullying proves expensive for employer

The Supreme Court of Victoria has awarded damages of almost \$600,000 to a worker who developed a severe psychological condition from 'sustained workplace bullying' by her, at times, violently moody manager.

Between 2003-2007 the worker was subjected to sustained intimidation, bullying and harassment.

No action had been taken by her employer to reduce the exposure of the worker to a hostile work environment that eventually broke her mental health.



AROUND THE GLOBE

USA

Combustible dust standard may get 'most wanted' status

The US Chemical Safety Board held a public meeting in late July in Washington DC at which its members were asked to agree to 'most wanted' status for a combustible dust standard.

The Board was not satisfied that OSHA had adequately implemented three previous recommendations following major disasters which occurred in 2001, 2005 and 2009.

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|------|--|
| 2001 | Tank explosion at Motiva Refinery, Delaware |
| 2005 | BP explosion and fire, Texas City |
| 2009 | Explosion, roof collapse in Garner, North Carolina |

If agreement is reached by the Board members it will result in that designation to be the first in CSB's history.

Source: *ohsonline* 16 July 2013

Life expectancy getting longer

Key points from the report, State of Health in the USA 1990-2010 Burden of Diseases, Injuries, Risk Factors:

- US life expectancy for both sexes combined increased from 75.2 years in 1990 to 78.2 years in 2010.
- Healthy life expectancy increased from 65.8 years to 68.1 years.
- Diseases and injuries with the largest number of years of life lost due to premature mortality in 2010 were ischemic heart disease, lung cancer, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and road injury.
- Diseases with the largest number of years lived with disability in 2010 were low back pain, major depressive disorder, other musculo-skeletal disorders, neck pain and anxiety disorders.
- The leading risk factors related to disability-adjusted life years were dietary risks, tobacco smoking, high body mass index, high blood pressure, high fasting plasma glucose, physical inactivity and alcohol use.
- Some important conclusions were that substantial progress had been made over 20 years in improving health but improvements in population health in the United States have not kept pace with advances in other wealthy nations.

Source: *JAMA Network online* 10 July 2013

Questionable benefits of wellness programs

According to a report by researchers at the Rand Corporation in the USA, wellness programs that try to get employees to become healthier and reduce medical costs have only a modest effect.

This finding runs contrary to claims by the mostly small firms that sell workplace wellness to companies ranging from corporate titans to mum-and-dad operations.

The report found that people who participate in such programs lose an average of only half-a-kilo a year for three years and participation was not associated with significant reductions in total cholesterol level. While there is some evidence that smoking-cessation programs do work, they do so only 'in the short term'.

Source: *COS magazine* 28 May 2013

USA fact sheet on working safely with nano-materials

OSHA has released a new fact sheet (January 2013) that provides workers and employers with basic information on the most current understanding of the potential hazards associated with exposure to nano-materials in the workplace.

The fact sheet also lists measures and best practices for controlling workers' exposure to nano-materials, including engineering controls, administrative controls, PPE and medical screening and surveillance.

Source: https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA_FS-3634.pdf

Imprisonment for impersonating a regulatory official

Connie Knight, who impersonated an OSHA-USA official and provided fraudulent hazardous waste safety training to individuals seeking to work during the clean-up of the DeepWater Horizon Oil Spill, the largest environmental disaster in US history, has been sentenced to 57 months in prison and ordered to pay victim restitution of US\$25,300.

Knight illegally profited from a community already suffering from the impacts of the oil spill, raising hopes for employment, said the assistant attorney general, Ignacia Moreno.

Source: ohsonline 17 May 2013

Another attempt to amend mine safety legislation in the USA

Another attempt to update safety legislation for the mining industry was made in April in the US Senate.

The proposed changes include increased penalty amounts and criminal sanctions, the creation of an accident investigation panel, increased subpoena authority for MSHA, expanded whistle-blower protection and numerous other changes.

The most significant difference between the original bill introduced in the House of Representatives (rejected) and the Senate bill is that the additional amendments to the Occupational Safety and Health Act (unchanged since 1970) have been retained. This makes the new attempt considerably more contentious as the industries impacted by that Act extend far beyond mining.

It would be remarkable for the new Bill to be successful.

SOUTH AMERICA

Lead poisoning comes to the Amazon

While it would seem odd to expect high blood lead levels in a remote area of the Peruvian Amazon, that is the case.

The metal is valuable there, since it is easily moulded to make perfect weights for fishing lines and nets. That convenience comes at a cost.

Three out of every four children in communities in the Corrientes River basin have blood lead levels higher than those considered excessive under US health guidelines.

The lead strips from electrical cables found inside the homes solved a mystery that had long puzzled researchers. Scientists had expected to find that water polluted by oil drilling upriver was responsible but, to their shock, they discovered that the children and teens were fashioning homemade fishing sinkers from scrap lead with their teeth.

Experts say that there is no safe lead level for children.

Source: Chemwatch Bulletin Board 6 May 2013

EUROPE

Common causes of work-related stress in Europe

The major findings from a European poll on work-related stress has revealed that insecurity from job reorganisation is thought to be the most common cause.

Other findings:

- Half the workers think work-related stress is common with 40% considering that it is not handled well at their workplace.
- There is low awareness of programmes or policies to make it easier for workers to continue working up to or beyond the retirement age, though the majority support their introduction.

Source: osha Press Release 9 May 2013

Occupational diseases kill approximately two million people globally each year

A new report from the United Nations calls for 'urgent and vigorous' action to address work-related diseases, which kill 2 million people globally each year. About 160 million more are afflicted by non-fatal occupational diseases.

ILO Director-General, Guy Ryder, said that the ultimate cost of occupational disease is human life.

It impoverishes workers and their families and can undermine whole communities when they lose their most productive workers.

The report identifies that work-related illnesses kill six times as many people as on-the-job accidents but tend to attract less attention.

Well documented occupational diseases such as pneumoconiosis and asbestos-related illness remain widespread while new diseases such as mental and musculoskeletal disorders are on the rise.

The cost is estimated at US\$2.8 trillion annually.

Source: ishn May 2013

EC prevents preventive action

The European Trade Union has expressed grave disappointment at the decision by the European Commission not to issue a directive on preventive action on musculoskeletal disease, opting instead for a simple recommendation.

This action is a result of employer organisations in Europe calling for increased deregulation of health and safety on the basis that it was holding back economic development.

The Union says that the UK government is at the forefront of the crusade to lower health and safety standards.

Source: etui Hesa Mag #07 2013



Occupational Health Society of Australia (WA Branch)

Incorporated in 1978, the Occupational Health Society of Australia (WA Branch) is a non-profit association.

The Society had been inactive for some years and in June 2013 was re-activated to provide a forum for the wide range of disciplines engaged in the occupational health profession in Western Australia.

The aims of the Society are:

- to develop effective occupational health practice within Western Australia;
- to encourage awareness by individuals, organisations and other bodies, of the role of occupational health;
- to provide a forum for professional contact between persons interested in, and working in, occupational health;
- to express an independent, professional viewpoint on all aspects of occupational health considered desirable in the public interest;
- to seek the improvement of an extension of the existing legislation for the promotion of safety and health at work in order to ensure uniform principles are applied in all occupational activities.

Visit www.ohswa.marcsta.com for more information.

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