

MONITOR

Official publication of the
Mining and Resource Contractors Safety Training Association



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MARCSTA is a not-for-profit Association. All proceeds are reinvested into the industry for future development of safety and training.

Merry Christmas

Harmonisation of national OHS laws - MARCSTA's response to the Draft Model Act and Stage 1 Regulations

MARCSTA's response to the proposed Model Act clearly expressed strong opposition to proposals for change which it believes will have negative consequences for the occupational health and safety of workers in Western Australia.

The aspects objected to were:

Deleting the words "occupational health" from the title of the Act.

REASON: The health of workers is becoming increasingly important in today's extended working hours environment with research around the world revealing that with people spending the greater part of their waking hours at work more attention needs to be paid to work-life quality. Deleting reference to "occupational health" in the title ignores the known facts.

Increasing the range and level of penalties.

REASON: The Robens Committee found 40 years ago that this approach was negative and inappropriate. No evidence has since been provided to the contrary.

Applying criminal law and imprisonment for occupational safety and health breaches.

REASON: The process of prosecution and sanctions of the criminal law is inappropriate to the majority of infringements of OHS law which arise mainly through carelessness, oversight, lack of knowledge or means, inadequate supervision or sheer inefficiency.

The Robens Committee recognised this and no convincing evidence to the contrary has been put forward in the discussion paper.

Allowing union "officials" to enter workplaces and interfere with existing procedures for the management of occupational safety and health.

REASONS: There are eminently satisfactory arrangements for managing safety and health in the workplace and there is no justification for interference by other parties, particularly as there is no requirement that these "officials" be required to demonstrate that they have competence in occupational health and safety.

There is no evidence that existing arrangements are inadequate or faulty.

Continued on page 2

The introduction of “representatives of a party” to the issue resolution process.

REASON: Once again, a proposal to alter the existing issue resolution process is without justification or foundation. The issue resolution process, as recognised by Robens, is one involving employers and employees and their safety and health representatives.

Using safety regulators to adjudicate where necessary has been shown to be a satisfactory independent solution.

Extending the enforcement powers of inspectors.

REASON: Western Australia has not experienced problems with the existing role and powers of safety inspectorates.

The Robens Committee were quite definite about the role of inspectors being “to prevent accidents and ill-health and the promotion of progressively better standards at work through the provision of information and skilled advice to industry and commerce.”

Providing unwanted police powers to inspectors is neither necessary nor appropriate.

The discussion paper included a Regulatory Impact Statement which concluded that national legislation might confer an overall marginal to small net benefit for business. A careful read of the Regulatory Impact Statement would not take that conclusion seriously as no evidence is forthcoming in the document to support it.

MARCSTA’s full response can be found on our website www.marcsta.com.

History repeating itself with industry to again pay for its safety inspectorate

The announcement by the Mines and Petroleum Minister at the recent Underground Mine Emergency Competition in Kalgoorlie that the resources industry would be charged with the cost of a further 72 bureaucrats to handle safety issues, some \$8 million, was a classical case of déjà vu.

In recent history the first restructure of the mining inspectorate took place in 1986-1988 following seven fatalities in November/December 1985 and was met by increasing tenement charges to cover the initial and ongoing costs (about \$1.8 million in dollars of the day).

After 21 deaths in the 13 months to February 1990 a further injection of resources was made and as the major computer-based systems were further developed additional charges were agreed to by industry which, once again, took the form of increases in tenement charges.

The huge growth of the industry since that time has meant that revenue to the Government has far exceeded the ongoing costs of maintaining the mines inspectorate.

It is important to remember that the increases in tenement charges on those occasions were agreed to by industry for specific purposes – the maintenance of a professional, well resourced inspectorate.

With history about to repeat itself industry will need to be careful that safeguards are put in place to ensure that further specific levies are used strictly for the purpose intended. Otherwise loss of corporate memory could see history repeated once again even though safety and health in the industry has never been better than it is today.

Injunction on union official sends message to government on harmonisation proposals

An injunction was granted barring a union official from engaging in unlawful industrial action which had nothing to do with any reasonable concern as to any imminent danger to the health or safety of any employee on the site. This should sound a clear warning to the WA Government of the consequences of adopting national harmonisation laws.

Should the national proposals proceed union officials granted entry permits will be able to enter workplaces by simply giving 24 hours notice of their intention to do so.

The misuse of this power without requiring the holders of entry permits to have any expertise in occupational safety and health would inevitably impact negatively on the management of OHS in the workplace.

Source: Injunction on union boss, WA Business News, Page 8, 1 October 2009.

NSW initiative to ensure maintenance of certificate holder competency in the coal sector

The NSW Coal Competence Board have issued a discussion paper in which it proposes a system which will provide a suitable mix of training and/or continuing professional development programmes according to the type of certificate of competence.

The mix will be determined by the general ongoing training and development needs of the specified function for which the certificate is required.

The system will support employers to ensure their certificate holders performing specified functions receive the necessary training and development to remain competent.

The implementation of the system is planned for the first half of 2010.

The discussion paper points out that no other Australian state has a system in place for ongoing training and development of certificate holders.

The lack of specific requirements in the discussion paper would seem to leave the proposed scheme open to a range of possibilities and to manipulation by vested interests. This would seem to be the case with continuing professional development systems currently espoused by professional institutions across the world and is witnessed by the proliferation of commercial "conferences" which are currently available and widely advertised as meeting CPD requirements.

The discussion paper lacks any reference to some form of examination or practical competence to be demonstrated which was, supposedly, the driver for the system proposed.

The proposals do not affect the metalliferous sector and come at a time when harmonisation of OHS laws across all states is the dominant theme.

Source: NSW Industry and Investment, Discussion Paper, The System of Training and Continuing Professional Development for Certificate of Competence Holders in the NSW Coal Industry, Invitation for Public Comment, 6 November 2009

Improved safety performance in the US construction industry

According to an analysis of federal safety data released by the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC), since the federal government switched to a safety oversight approach known as "collaborative safety" in 1998, the national construction fatality rate has declined 47 per cent and the number of recordable safety incidents by 38 per cent.

The approach creates incentives for companies to find and fix safety problems before incidents occur while maintaining strong penalties for companies that let safety problems lag until someone is hurt.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics recently released fatal occupational injuries data revealing that fatalities in the private construction sector in 2008 declined 20 per cent from 2007.

Source: EHS Today, 31 August 2009



MARCSA members

ORDINARY MEMBERS

Alpha Safety Management
Ausdrill Ltd
Barmenco Limited
BGC Contracting Pty Ltd
Cape
GFR Group
GR Engineering Services

GRD Minproc
Holcim (Australia) Pty Ltd
Kellogg Brown & Root Pty Ltd
Roche Mining Process Engineering
Skilled Group Ltd
Terex Materials Processing and Mining
Australia
Thiess Pty Ltd
Westrac Equipment Pty Ltd

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

AVELING
Jako Industries Pty Ltd
Mandurah Safety and Training Services
Pty Ltd
Mine SafeGear
Strudwick HR



Do vision problems result in earlier deaths

LOOKING AFTER YOUR EYESIGHT IS IMPORTANT TO LIVING LONGER.

Dr Michael Karpa of Westmead Millennium Institute Sydney and colleagues studied more than 3,600 people who were 49 and older in the early 1990's. By 2007 more than a third of them – 1,273 people – had died.

Those with vision problems that couldn't be corrected were 35 per cent more likely to have died during those 13 years and those with such problems who were younger than 75 were more than twice as likely to have died.

The most likely tie between poor vision and death according to the study in the Archives of Ophthalmology was trouble walking.

The researchers speculate that not only might the elderly who don't see well fall more but they are less likely to see a doctor regularly or have prescriptions filled. Also, they may be more socially isolated and less able to seek urgent help when needed. Other possible contributors could be lack of exercise or poor diet which can lead to heart disease and other killers.

A useful study could be one which would look at the relationship, if any, between poor vision and trips and falls in the workplace. How often do employers conduct vision checks to determine employees' eyesight?

British researchers have found that a daily dose of Vitamin D substantially cuts the risk of seniors falling. Once again, checking employees for Vitamin D levels in addition to their vision could reduce the risk of slips and falls in the workplace.

Source: AAP Reuters, 12 October 2009 and 2 October 2009

2008 USA national study of the changing workforce

Specific findings about the state of US employees' health have emerged from the 2008 National Study The State of Health in the American Workforce.

- Employees' physical health shows downward trends;
- Men's health has been deteriorating more than women's health;
- Mental health has remained stable over the past six years – but a large proportion of the workforce show signs of clinical depression;
- Sleep problems are pervasive; and
- Stress levels are rising.

The findings show that the work environment – where each of us spends most of our waking hours – has a considerable impact on our health and well being. Improving the work environment is a low-to-no cost investment that every employer should make if we are truly to reform health care, reduce spiralling health care expenditure and actually improve health.

The report contains a range of useful information that is relevant and applicable to Australian workplaces. It should be required reading for organisations, employees and OHS professionals.

Source: Families and Work Institute 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce, The State in the American Workforce



Healthy workplaces critical to long term health

An initiative of the National Quality Institute and the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety is one which could be adapted for all employers/employees in Western Australia.

Run annually over a month or so Health Workplace Month is a web based initiative (www.healthyworkplacemonth.ca/browse) to increase awareness of the importance of workplace health.

It offers ideas for organisations to improve workplace conditions and post success stories and encourages employers to take part in various workplace health and wellness changes. It also provides checklists to evaluate workplace healthiness.

With most waking time spent getting to, being at and getting home from work, long term health is now recognised as largely dependent on people's working environment and is increasingly being recognised as crucial to the quality of life of an ageing workforce.

Source: Worksafe Magazine, Healthy workplaces boost the bottom line, Lynn Welburn, September/October 2009, Worksafe BC

Allowing employees to feel at home at their desks can boost productivity

New research suggests that work productivity and morale can be improved by giving employees the freedom to develop the look and feel of their own office environment.

The study showed that in comparison to colleagues working in a lean environment (ie a spare office with cleared desks) people empowered to develop aspects of their own workspace showed average increases of 27% in feelings of well being and 32% in productivity.

The findings also suggest that a 'lean space' design generally leads to a heightened sense of alienation among employees, discomfort in the workplace and symptoms of sick building syndrome.

Source: EHS Today, 18 September 2009



Living longer needs redesign of working life

Working conditions must be improved for older people if governments and companies are to persuade them to continue contributing to economic growth into their old age, according to a recent study.

The Danish study published in the Lancet showed that more than half of babies born in rich nations today will live to see their 100th birthday – a trend that means that they are also very likely to have to work longer into old age.

Arguably the best option is to redesign working life for older workers to make it healthier and more satisfying than at present and achieve improved occupational health and quality of life, increased productivity and a larger proportion of the population still in the workforce.

Source: AAP Reuters, 8 November 2009



MARCSTA training providers currently delivering

Dennis Aitken (U)
Jayson Aveling
Graham Bailey
Carl Berglin
Wayne Berkrey
Danny Bogнар
John Christie (C) (O)
Stacey Clark
Brian Cloney

Dale Cocker (U) (S)
Jim Dandie
Geoff Day
Vlad Doguilev
Peter Dowding
Linda Elezovich
Donelle Fraser (C)
Ross Graham
Brett Green

Sheryl Henley (C) (O)
Jeffrey Hickin
Ralph Keegan (S)
Joe Maglizza
Les McIntyre
Neil McMeekin
Guy Mead
Katherine Montague
John Preston

Merryn Richards
Jason Roberts
Victor Roberts
Grant Shearwin (C) (O)
Julian Strudwick (C)
Marcus Taylor
Peter Tynan
Micheal White
Graham Williams

Paul Willoughby
All training providers listed provide the General Safety Induction program.
C denotes the Work Safely in the Construction Industry program
O denotes the Occupational Safety and Health for Supervisors and Managers program.
S denotes the extended working hours program.
U denotes the underground program.



Issue 4/2009

Worker Health and Wellbeing

Sleepiness kills young driving skills

Late night sleep deprivation combined with inexperience is a potentially deadly mix for young drivers.

Statistics show younger drivers account for around 25 per cent of fatal car accidents and 50 per cent of injury crashes. Young adults are four times more likely to be involved in fall-asleep crashes and account for almost two-thirds of all fatigue-related crashes.

Only one state, Western Australia, has gone as far as introducing night-time driving curfews between the hours of midnight and 5:00 am for novice drivers for the first six months of their P-plates.

MARCSTA has consistently advocated that a fatigue training program should form part of the requirements for issue of a young driver's licence. A half-day program would educate them of the dangers of both fatigue and alcohol when driving, particularly at the critical times of low alertness. This can be done at a very small cost that would certainly save lives and/or reduce the severe injury incidence.

Source: ABC Health and Wellbeing, 12 November 2009

Driving and texting

Research by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute has shown that a truck driver looking down while texting for a mere 6 seconds while driving at 90kph will travel the length of a football field and not realise that he travelled so far, so fast.

The US Harvard Center of Risk Analysis estimates that mobile phone activity contributes to 636,000 motor vehicle crashes, 330,000 injuries and 260 fatalities per year.

However, it's not just the inappropriate use of mobile phones that is causing undue risk it is also injuries to workers listening to ipods while on the job. Injuries occur when employees listen to ipods instead of listening to co-workers yelling warnings or hearing the warnings from a truck or forklift backing up.

Employers need to recognise the consequences of using technology in the workplace so that they can put specific policies into their employee handbook, properly train employees and enforce those policies.

Source: EHS Today, 1 September 2009

Fatigue warning invention to save lives

Queensland coal mine workers will soon be fitted with anti-fatigue caps to alert them when they become dangerously sleepy.

The new anti-fatigue 'smart cap' will soon be used in the field after gaining support from Anglo Coal.

Fatigue information is collected by microelectronics concealed within a standard baseball cap. When a fatigue danger limit is reached a warning message is sent from the operators cap to an in-cab display, notifying them of the threat and alerting them to the need to stop, rest and refresh.

The caps will be given to workers from December and Anglo Coal Australia has expressed an interest in backing the commercial production of the caps.

Source: Brisbane Times, 29 September 2009

New study could help shift workers get more sleep

A study published in *Chronobiology International* has shown that the use of blue light blocking eyeglasses can help facilitate daytime sleep for shift workers.

Permanent night shift workers from both summer and winter groups were asked to wear specialised blue light blocking glasses when outdoors.

The glasses were designed by the team to block the transmission of blue light because this is the portion of the light spectrum that most affects the body's circadian clock and sleep-wake rhythm. They also wore light monitors on their wrists.

Both groups obtained 30 minutes more sleep with the same time in bed, suggesting fewer awakenings and better sleep efficacy.

It is well established that our circadian clock is most sensitive to the blue portion of the visual spectrum, says Alexandre Sasseville, lead author of the article in *Chronobiology International*.

This light suppresses melatonin production, the substance our body clock uses to know that it is night time and time to fall asleep.

Source: ISHN, 9 November 2009

Fatigue leads to medical treatment errors

A group representing Queensland doctors says that doctor fatigue is responsible for the deaths of public hospital patients. Some doctors are being forced to work for up to 72 hours without a break.

Almost 60 per cent of hospital doctors surveyed said that they had made mistakes performing procedures while fatigued and 80 per cent admitted to mistakes in prescribing medications.

Queensland Health is currently negotiating a new pay deal with doctors and the doctors' association is pushing for shifts to be limited to 12 hours with a continuous 10 hour rest break in-between work.

Source: ABC News Stories 7 September 2009

Safe systems of work essential in all workplaces

The WorkSafe WA Commissioner, Nina Lyhne, has issued a reminder to employers of the need to have safe systems of work in place, in particular, tag and lock out procedures, when maintenance work is being carried out on any type of machinery with moving parts. This follows an incident in which a worker's legs were crushed under the wheels of a truck trailer.

A mechanic was investigating an air leak under the trailer while the attached prime mover was idling. The vehicle was reversed, unaware that the mechanic was still under the trailer.

The company was fined \$25,000 for failing to provide and maintain a safe work environment and \$5,000 for failing to notify WorkSafe of the injury to its employee.

Source: Department of Commerce Media Statement 12 November 2009

Obesity and cancer

The American Institute for Cancer Research reports that having too much body fat causes nearly half the cases of endometrial cancer – a type of cancer of the uterus – and one third of oesophageal cancer cases.

Obesity causes more than 100,000 cases of cancer in the US each year and the number is on the increase.

More than 26 per cent of Americans are obese, defined as having a body mass index of 30 or higher.

Source: AAP Reuters, 6 November 2009

OSHA releases guidance for silica control in construction

A new guidance document addressing the control of worker exposure to dust containing crystalline silica has been published by the US OSHA.

The publication is intended to assist employers in providing a safe and healthy workplace and includes methods for controlling silica such as wet cutting during construction operations.

View the document at <http://www.osha.gov/Publications/3362silica-exposures.pdf>

Source: EHS Today, 18 September 2009



Controlling Silica Exposures in Construction



OSHA 3362-04 2009

New model regulations for workplace chemicals

Safe Work Australia has announced that it will commence drafting of model regulations for workplace chemicals.

The regulations will be based on the National Standard for the Control of Workplace Hazardous Chemicals.

The new draft Australian Criteria for the Classification of Hazardous Chemicals will introduce to the Australian workforce the international classification criteria contained in the Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals.

The Classification Criteria are scheduled to be introduced at the time the proposed model legislation is put in place.

Source: Chemwatch, 6 November 2009

Chemicals and noise – a hazardous combination

It is no surprise that most work-related hearing loss is caused by noise exposure and that genetics and age can also be contributors.

What is not as well known is that some chemical exposures can pose a risk to hearing. Exposure to some chemicals and noise at the same time can significantly increase the risk of damage to the hearing and balance functions of the ear from "ototoxic" effects.

Ototoxins are chemicals which can damage hearing and cause mild to severe hearing loss, tinnitus or deafness.

They can be ingested, absorbed or inhaled into the body.

Some chemicals associated with hearing loss:

benzene, carbon disulfide, carbon monoxide, ethylbenzene, hydrogen cyanide, lead, mercury, n-hexane, solvent mixtures, styrene, trichloroethylene, toluene, xylene.

There is a growing awareness of the chemical hazards to hearing that will hopefully lead to reduced risk of work-related hearing loss.

Source: Health and Safety Report, CCOHS, Vol 7, Issue 10, October 2009

Student loses six fingers and both thumbs in art class in the UK

A student was left with only two fingers after using plaster-of-Paris to make a cast of her own hands in an art and design class.

Unaware of the chemical reaction causing extreme heat which occurs when plaster-of-Paris is mixed with water, the student placed both her hands directly in the substance in order to make a cast. It set quickly and her hands were stuck.

Fellow pupils, a classroom teacher and paramedics were unable to prevent the plaster setting.

The chemical reaction resulted in her fingers being so severely burned that they required amputation of all four fingers and thumb of her left hand and the thumb, little and ring fingers of her right hand.

No risk assessment, required by law, for the handling of hazardous substances had been carried out and pupils were not given any instruction on the handling of the substance.

The school governing body was fined A\$35,000 for breaches of safety and health law.

Source: HSE, 12 October 2009



Above: The student's hands after the accident.

Slips, trips and falls injury rate in hospitals reduced by 60 per cent

Researchers conducting a scientific examination to reduce the incidence of slips, trips and falls for hospital workers have found evidence that implementation of a broad-scale prevention program can significantly reduce injury claims.

The researchers have been awarded the Best Paper Award from the US Liberty Mutual Research Institute.

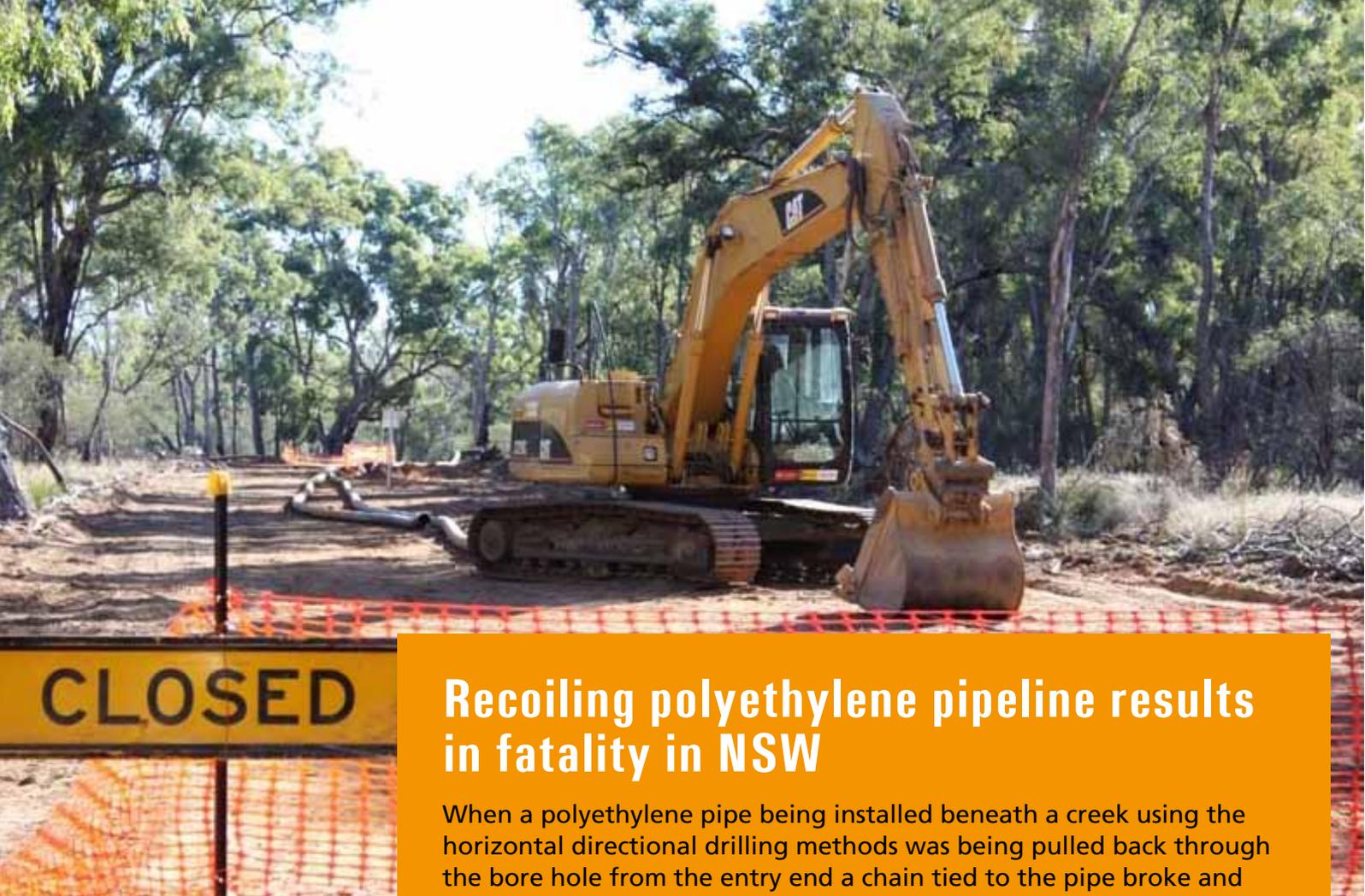
The 10 year project represents a significant advancement for contemporary ergonomics and provides much needed evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to reduce the incidence of slips, trips and falls.

The researchers designed, implemented and evaluated a comprehensive slip, trip and fall prevention program for hospital employees in three acute-care hospitals. They examined the injury experience of hospital employees for 10 years, before and after implementation of the program.

The hospitals' total workers' compensation rate declined by 59 per cent after the intervention, a rate significantly greater than the national hospital lost-work-day slip, trip and fall injury rate.

Source: Evaluation of a comprehensive slip, trip and fall prevention programme for hospital employees. Bell JL, Collins JW, Wolf L, Gronqvist R, Chiou S, Chang WR, Sorock GS, Courtney TK, Lombardi DA, Evanoff B.





Recoiling polyethylene pipeline results in fatality in NSW

When a polyethylene pipe being installed beneath a creek using the horizontal directional drilling methods was being pulled back through the bore hole from the entry end a chain tied to the pipe broke and the elastic strain in the pipe relaxed violently causing fatal head injury to a sub-contractor who was standing in the zone of pipeline recoil.

The Mine Safety Operations Branch has issued a recommendation that systems for ensuring safe operation of directional boring activities be developed, safe systems of work be developed and implemented and a review be undertaken of the use of chains for pulling/snigging.

Source: NSW Mine Safety Alert SA09-10

USA workplace injury and illness on the decline

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics has reported the following findings from its 2008 Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses.

- Incidence rates for injuries and illnesses combined among private industry establishments declined significantly in 2008 for all case types, with the exception of job transfer or restriction cases whose rate remained unchanged from 2007. The number of cases of injuries and illnesses combined declined significantly in 2008 for all case types.
- For injuries only, both the incidence rate and the number of cases in private industry establishments declined significantly in 2008 compared to 2007 — each falling 8 percent from the year earlier.
- The total recordable case injury and illness incidence rate was highest in 2008 among mid-size private industry establishments (those employing between 50 and 249 workers) and lowest among small establishments (those employing fewer than 11 workers) compared to establishments of other sizes.

Source: ISHN, 2 November 2009

MARCSTA annual general meeting 2009

At the Annual General Meeting held on 27 November, Joe Maglizza, representing Holcim (Australia) Pty Ltd, was elected as Chairman for 2010.

John Christie, Alpha Safety Management, was added to the existing Committee of Management.

In his Chairman's Report, Ross Graham commented on the extensive range of OHS training which provided national qualifications and on the continuing high standards of delivery of those programs by licensed providers.

He advised of the constitutional changes proposed to create opportunities for a wider range of membership and for MARCSTA to broaden its client base and program range.

Ross spoke extensively on the negative consequences for OHS in Western Australia of adopting industrial relations-linked proposals contained in the proposed national model legislation, pointing to the workability of current arrangements.

Noting the appointment of Simon Ridge as State Mining Engineer, he expressed the appreciation of the Management Committee for the support rendered to the Association by the now-retired Martin Knee during his term of office.

Ross will continue his personal support of the Association as Deputy Chairman for 2010.



**Mining and Resource
Contractors Safety
Training Association**



Left: Chairman for 2010, Joe Maglizza

Below: the 2009 AGM



MARCSTA who's who?

Chairman

Ross Graham, Terex Materials Processing and Mining

Deputy Chairman

Joe Maglizza, Holcim (Australia) Pty Ltd

Director Safety and Health

Patrick Gilroy AM

Training Manager

Sheryl Kelly

Committee of Management

Allaine Coleman

Terry Condipodero

Peter Nicholl

Kim Stewart

Monitor Editor

Geoff Taylor

Breathalyzers – review and compare

Choice trialled electronic and disposable breathalyzers and the results were disturbing.

Based on their results, Choice does not believe any of the personal breathalyzers they trialled were sufficiently accurate to be recommended for use. Indeed, several of the manufacturers or distributors they contacted said the readings from the devices are to be used as a guide only, not as a conclusive measure.

In the recent trial seven of the nine breathalyzers underestimated blood alcohol levels meaning that the readings indicated it was fine for the user to drive when in fact they were over the legal driving limit.

Source: Choice, September 2009

Retired workers feel better

A study carried out by Swedish and British scientists which took annual surveys of workers' self rated health, has found that between the year before retirement and the year after, the risk of workers saying they were not well fell from 19 to 14% - a drop the researchers said corresponded to a gain in health of eight to 10 years.

Put in another way, in terms of sub-optimal health, people suddenly get eight to 10 years younger when they retire and the retirees continued to feel better throughout the seven years the study followed them.

Source: AAP Reuters, 8 November 2009

Psychosocial risks the top cause of doctor visits for work-related illnesses in France

Occupational health surveillance reveals that for the first time, depression and anxiety are the main reasons workers consult a doctor in France. OHS doctors report that work is directly implicated in 80% of cases.

Doctors employed at work-related illness centres say that work rather than personal life factors are most prevalent in the service sector; finance, property, retail, transport, communications, education and health. More women than men seek medical advice about them.

Source: HESA, 29 October 2009

Folate may prevent hearing loss in men

A new study by US researchers suggests that increased intakes of folate and folic acid may reduce the risk of hearing loss in men by 20 per cent.

The study identified 3559 cases of men with hearing loss. When the nutritional data was analysed, men over the age of 60 with high folate intake from foods and supplements, had a 20 per cent decrease in risk of developing hearing loss.

A previous study in 2007 reported that folic acid supplements delayed age-related hearing loss in the low frequency region.

Source: Chemwatch, Bulletin Board, 6 November 2009

But does folic acid raise the risk of cancer?

Norwegian researchers have found that lung cancer rates were 25 per cent higher among those who took folic acid and vitamin B12 supplements compared with the general population but overall cancer deaths and deaths from other causes were also higher in the supplement group.

They claim that folic acid given over a period of more than three years may feed the growth of cancers that were too small to be detected otherwise and raises new questions about the benefits of fortifying foods with folic acid.

The Norwegian researchers say that the results need confirmation in other populations and underline the call for safety monitoring following the widespread consumption of folic acid from dietary supplements and fortified foods.

In earlier studies it has been suggested that folic acid and supplements raise the risk of prostate cancer and in another that fortifying foods with folic acid raises the risk of colon cancer.

Source: AAP Reuters 17 November 2009