



the monitor

keeping industry informed of developments in occupational health and safety

Issue 3 Vol 16 August 2012



Workshop presenters L-R: Leigh Cleary, Steve Allsop and Simon Ridge with MARCSTA Chairman, Ross Graham

WORKSHOP INTRODUCES NEW THINKING TO MANAGE SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The controversial topic of substance abuse in mining and petroleum industry workplaces was the focus of a MARCSTA training workshop in Perth in July, led by four of Australia's leading experts on substance abuse.

The full day event was attended by 50 workplace health and safety professionals from across the resource sector.

One theme of the day was that recognition that most substance abusers are people in employment is a key to management of substance abuse in the community.

Another theme was the importance of ensuring that employers in the resource industries are fully informed on the identification, treatment and management of the problem as Federal and State governments move to harmonise work health and safety laws across Australia.

Speakers said it was obviously in the interests of industry to manage and minimise drug abuse. While drug abuse was no worse in the resource industries than it was in the wider community, it did have serious implications for resource industry employers.

Professor Steve Allsop, Director of the Perth based National Drug Research Institute, told the workshop that alcohol remained the drug of greatest concern across the Australian community, with alcohol-related problems occupying 60% of police-time Australia-wide.

He said that the three types of drugs – depressants (alcohol, cannabis and heroin), stimulants (caffeine and amphetamines) and hallucinogens (LSD and mushrooms) were available and those most commonly causing workplace problems were alcohol, cannabis and amphetamines.

Problems in the workplace, including the resource industries, reflected problems in the community and affordability and availability were a major factor in their use.

The development of an effective Workplace Drug and Alcohol Policy must address the properties of the problem drugs, individual workplace factors and the environment in which drugs are taken. Policies by themselves are inadequate unless they are tailored to specific workplace situations.

Continued on page 3

In this issue ...

Workshop introduces new thinking to manage substance abuse 1

Bullying 4

OHS harmonisation 4

WA key OSH statistics 2010-11 5

WorkCover WA notices 5

US mine industry's safety and health management system . 6

Comparative Performance Monitoring Report 6

Regulatory inspections result in cost savings 7

Construction industry under scrutiny again 7

Alcohol and drug testing - a step towards protecting safety in the workplace 7

NSW mining industry tackling mental health..... 8

Diesel engine exhaust declared carcinogen 9

Diesel exhaust invisible particulates hazardous to health..... 9

Early detection of malignant mesothelioma..... 10

Obesity addressed in major study..... 11

Obesity in the workplace - a safety issue..... 11

Improving health in Victorian workplaces 11

Early use of cannabis can have life-long effects..... 12

Diabetes and the linkage to hearing loss 12

Lack of sleep linked to incidence of pain..... 13

Back injuries - mental health linked 13

MARCSTA training in Bulgaria..... 14

MARCSTA training for African scholars..... 14

Managing noise in the 21st century..... 15

Around the globe..... 16

MARCSTA members..... 18

MARCSTA training providers 18



Issue 3

Vol 16 August 2012

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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
- Resources and Infrastructure Industry
- Construction, Plumbing and Services Integrated Framework

Applications for recognition of prior learning may be lodged for all training programs.

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Participants at the Managing Substance Abuse in the Workplace workshop

WORKSHOP INTRODUCES NEW THINKING TO MANAGE SUBSTANCE ABUSE ...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Dr Charles Appleton, Director of Biochemistry and Toxicology, Queensland Medical Laboratories, explained the crucial importance of drug testing methods complying with Australian/NZ standards for both urine and oral fluid testing, with procedures for collection, transportation, analysis and reporting. He stressed that failure to comply with rigorous standards at all stages of testing, nullified the test results.

Dr Appleton gave examples of the types of misleading 'positive' results in urine testing, the ways in which a false urine sample could be contrived and legitimate 'innocent' positives which could result from over the counter medications, prescribed medications, food constituents and products of metabolism of other drugs.

Dr Appleton concluded with a detailed explanation of the recent emergence of synthetic cannabinoids which were first sold as herbal mixtures in Germany in 2004. Synthetic substances were originally developed for medical use. Currently seven Australian laboratories offer testing for these substances.

Dr Appleton said that while attempts had been made to classify cannabis-like substances in Australia, the ability of organisations in Australia to produce mixtures that avoided nationwide bans had become a major problem for regulators.

Synthetic cannabis was still marketed in Australia despite the introduction of a nationwide ban.

At least three on-site screen tests are now available in Australia, however in the absence of an Australian Standard for this testing, there is a degree of inconsistency with metabolites sought and with detection thresholds.

When an industry adopts use of one of these devices it is important that it is established with the confirmation laboratory, before commencing referring non-negative samples, that the confirmation laboratory will actually be testing for the substances potentially giving a non-negative initial screen.

Dr Appleton said there was no sign of a diminishing requirement for drug testing in Australia, there was no sign of falling use, no court challenge to findings yet and no challenge to action taken on positive findings yet.

Leigh Cleary, Senior Project Officer, Drug and Alcohol Office WA provided a national perspective of the consumption of alcohol, cannabis and prescription drugs over the past year in Australia and identified the economic and social impacts of alcohol. He outlined the range of services available from the Drug and Alcohol Office and introduced both an individual and a workplace counselling model.

Simon Ridge, Western Australia's Acting Executive Director of the Resources Safety Department and State Mining Engineer, Department of Mines and Petroleum, advised of the significant implications for the resources industries of the proposed nationally harmonised occupational health and safety legislation.

This would require mine operators to manage risks to health and safety risks at their workplaces associated with fatigue, physical or psychological impairment and the improper use of drugs including alcohol.

Key legislative responsibilities as harmonised legislation is introduced will include consulting with workers concerning the testing regimes to be introduced and the provision of employee education and assistance programs.

The workshop was widely reported in the national news media, especially in interviews with the best known speakers on ABC national, state and regional radio, and also on ABC television.

Source: *Peter Ellery and Associates*

Legislation

BULLYING

With the recent publicity about the definition of bullying a timely survey of members of the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers, Australia has revealed that a staggering 75.2% of engineers, scientists and other professionals said that they had been bullied while in their current profession, showing that bullying doesn't just happen to blue-collar workers or in the schoolyard.

What is important and useful is the type and prevalence of bullying reported.

Exclusion	70.3%
Unfair expectations	66.6%
Ignoring	62.5%
Yelling	49.7%
Humiliation in front of peers	45.3%
Swearing	39.1%
Threats of being dismissed	36.6%

Other types of bullying reported were racial discrimination, sexual discrimination, threats and acts of violence and cyber bullying.

A spokesperson for the Association said that 82.5% of respondents had witnessed bullying by a manager at their organisation. He added that while 62.5% were aware that management had been notified of bullying at their workplace, 43.5% of respondents said management had taken no action.

The current inquiry into workplace bullying by the Federal House Standing Committee on Education and Employment may yield an up-to-date determination of what constitutes bullying.

Bullying prevention kit

WorkCover Authority of NSW recently issued a Bullying Prevention Kit, developed to assist managers, workers and others to prevent bullying in the workplace.

Using the kit is a three step process - *distributing* the bullying prevention improvement tool, *reviewing* the results and *improving* bullying prevention systems using the advice sheets.

Source: SafetySolutions July 2012 / WorkCover NSW

OHS HARMONISATION

Western Australia

In Western Australia consultants have been appointed to assess the costs and benefits of the proposed WHS regulations as they apply specifically to Western Australian workplaces.

The survey is expected to be concluded by mid October and a final report provided to the Minister in November.

It now appears quite certain that the existing OHS legislation both general and for the mining sector will continue in place at least until the middle of 2013.

South Australia

In South Australia the political deadlock on the passage of the WHS laws continues with little sign of the stalled Work Health and Safety Bill being passed.

With regard to the ongoing debate about the costs of transition to the harmonised OHS law, the Productivity Commission report Impacts of COAG Reforms: Business Regulation and VET released in May has found that while it will cost Australian employers about \$850 million to transition to the new Work Health and Safety Act, the cost of complying with OHS laws will fall by between \$120 million and \$620 million a year.

Source: WorkSafe WA Newsletter

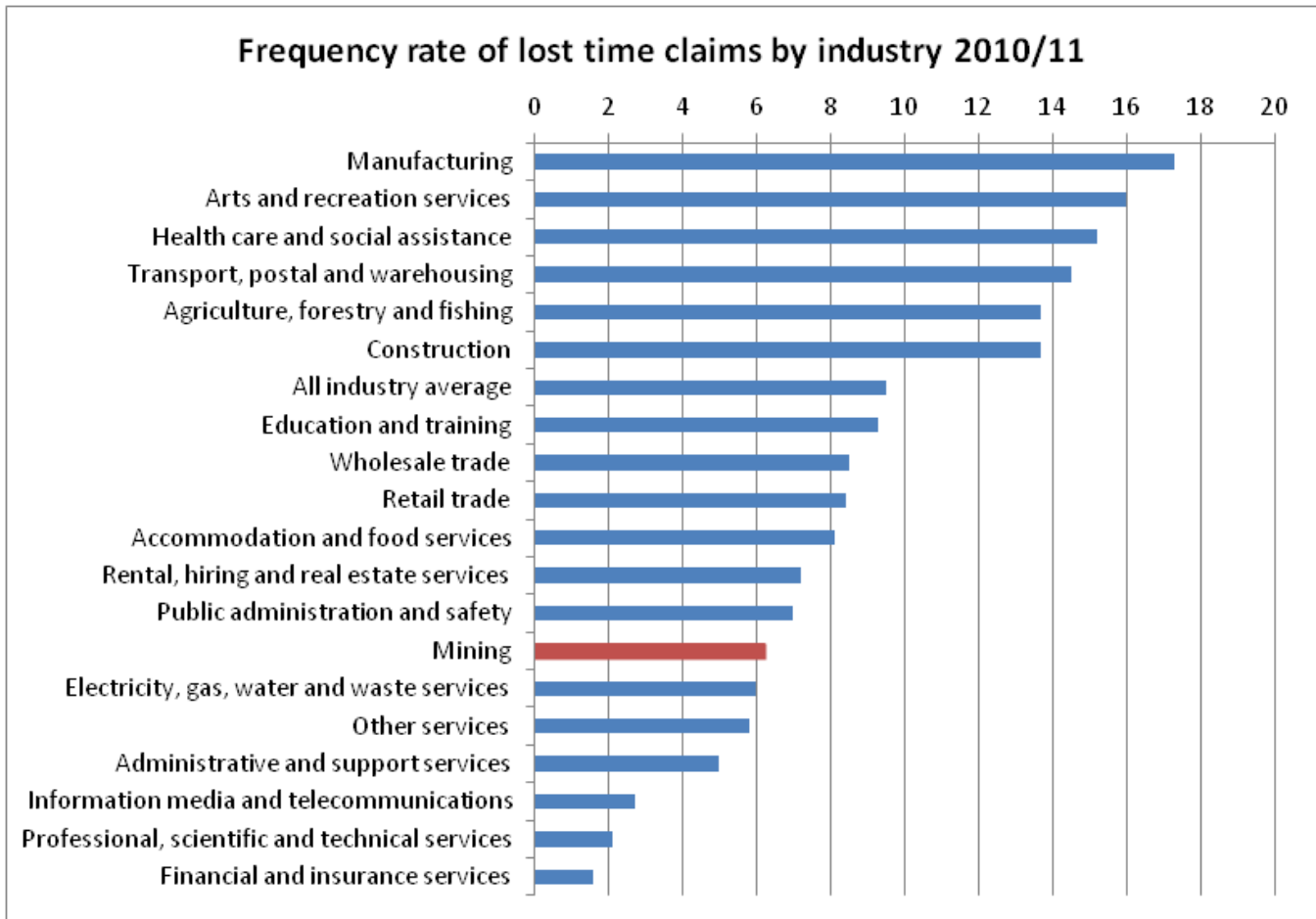
WA KEY OSH STATISTICS 2010-11 PRELIMINARY DATA

The Department of Commerce has released preliminary data on occupational safety and health in WA derived from workers' compensation claims of workers covered by the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act in 2010/11.

Some key findings:

- 17 work-related fatalities due to trauma were recorded in 2011/12.
- The average number of days lost for severe LTI/D's was 255 days.
- The lost time injury and disease incidence rate (LTI/D's per 100 workers) was 1.64, an increase over the previous year (1.54).

The most informative industry information was the Frequency Rate claims by industry which clearly identify the sectors whose performance warrants close attention by regulators.



Source: Workers' Compensation in Western Australia Annual Statistical Report 2007/08 to 2010/11 WorkCover WA

WORKCOVER WA NOTICES

WorkCover WA has advised that, acting on legal advice, it will no longer, upon request and with the consent of the individual involved, supply information to employers and prospective employers in relation to workers' compensation claims histories.

The prescribed amount, which is the maximum amount an injured worker can receive in terms of weekly payments for loss of earnings during the life of their claim, has been increased by just over 4% from \$190,701 to \$198,365.

Source: WorkCover WA

SAFETY

Setting Goals.

0 fatalities.
Reduce injury rate by 50%.
In 5 years.
This is the 0:50:5 goal.

US MINE INDUSTRY'S SAFETY AND HEALTH MANAGEMENT SYSTEM INITIATIVE

The National Mining Association of America has released the CORESafety management system developed specifically for US mining operations by experienced mining safety professionals.

The initiative led by members of the Association is an approach to mining safety and health to prevent accidents before they happen that involves leadership, management and assurance. Its objective is to have zero fatalities and a 50 per cent reduction in mining's injury rate within five years (0:50:5).

The management system involves 20 modules with suggested timelines for completion.

Companies with an existing safety and health management system can use the CORESafety gap assessment tool to determine if improvement opportunities exist.

Full details are available from www.coresafety.org

Source: NMAA

COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Comparative Performance Monitoring (CPM) 13th edition report provides trend analysis on the work health and safety and workers' compensation schemes operating in Australia and New Zealand. Information in the report is designed to help gauge the success of different approaches undertaken by the various workers' compensation and work health and safety authorities to reduce the incidence of work-related injury and disease.

Key findings of the 13th edition:

- Nationally, employers are now paying 1.53% of payroll in workers' compensation rates compared to 2.01% in 2005/06 (WA 1.22%).
- Body stressing continues to dominate as the greatest proportion of the claims (41%)
- The rate of compensated injury fatalities is at its lowest level since the start of the National OHS Strategy in 2002 and is expected to achieve the target of 20% reduction by 2012.
- The incidence of injury and disease in the workplace has slightly improved from 2009/10 but the target of a 40% reduction by 2012 will not be achieved.

Incidence of Serious Injuries and Disease

Qld	15.5
Tas	15.4
NSW	14.2
ACT	13.1
SA	12.1
NT	11.9
WA	11.5
Vic	9.5

Regulatory inspections result in cost savings

A study by business school economists from the University of California and Harvard University confirms that OSHA inspections not only prevent workers from getting hurt on the job, they also save billions of dollars for employers through reduced workers' compensation costs.

Key findings:

- A 9.4% drop in injury claims at workplaces in the four years following an inspection
- A 26% average saving on workers' compensation costs compared to similar, non-inspected companies
- A 355% average saving for an employer (small or large) as a result of an OSHA inspection
- \$6b estimated savings to employers nationwide

The study found no evidence that the inspection process and subsequent corrective actions came at the expense of employment, sales, credit ratings, or the firm's survival.

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY UNDER SCRUTINY AGAIN

A three month series of inspections by WorkSafe Vic has found 226 sites where work was stopped because safe work management systems (SWMS) were not in place, were inadequate or not being followed.

WorkSafe found that five years after the requirement to have SWMS's in place was introduced some builders and sub-contractors have not fully implemented them into their business.

WorkSafe will shortly introduce a back-to-basics campaign which will look at a range of safety issues beginning with induction and training as well as site housekeeping.

Source: WorkSafe Vic

Alcohol and drug testing – a step towards protecting safety in the workplace

A full Federal Court has emphasised the important role drug and alcohol testing plays in ensuring workplace safety.

The CFMEU had appealed a previous Fair Work decision, arguing that there was no evidence that random drug and alcohol tests would improve safety on a major Victorian motorway upgrade.

In dismissing the union's application, the Federal Court said that every employer also owes a duty of care to its employees to take reasonable care (under the Victorian OHS Act) for their safety. So an employer who took the precaution of first ascertaining whether drugs or alcohol have been imbibed as a step towards protecting the safety of employees at the workplace may be seen to be attending to its own obligations.

The Chief Executive of the motorway consortium said that nowadays there is a wide acceptance in Australia and overseas that an appropriately structured and implemented alcohol and drug testing regime is an important and reasonable control mechanism to address the substantial risk of employees working while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Source: OHS Alert June 2012



NSW MINING INDUSTRY TACKLING MENTAL HEALTH

Participants at the NSW Minerals Council OHS Conference courtesy ABC

The NSW mining sector has identified mental health in the mining industry as an important priority. In a major paper launched at its recent Occupational Health and Safety Conference, the NSW Minerals Council recommends a comprehensive industry-wide approach to tackling mental health and illness, including the development of a "roadmap for mental health".

The study was carried out for the NSW Minerals Council by the University of Newcastle and the Hunter Institute of Mental Health, on the extent and impact of mental health problems and mental illness on individuals, the community and the workplace, in particular the NSW minerals industry. It reported the following findings:

- mental illness is common, with 20% of the community experiencing one of the common mental illnesses in the last 12 months
- between 8,000 and 10,000 people experienced one of the common mental illnesses in a 12 month period in the NSW minerals industry across all employment categories
- treatment is effective and the effects of non-treatment on workplace productivity are significant
- costs to the NSW minerals industry attributable to mental illness are \$320 million to \$450 million per annum
- a comprehensive and integrated approach is recommended for addressing mental health and mental illness in the NSW minerals industry.

The Institute director, Trevor Hazell, says that mental illness costs a single mine between \$300,000 and \$400,000 a year.

He said that there are three main areas of impact:

- absenteeism; people who are suffering from anxiety or depression take more time off work
- presenteeism; people coming to work when they are unwell are less productive even though they are not off work
- injury; people with mental illness are at higher risk of having an injury at work

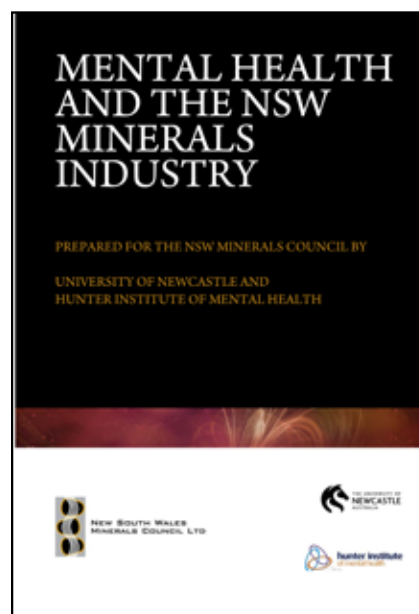
The Minerals Council CEO Stephen Galilee commented that NSW leads the way on tackling mental health challenges, providing drug and alcohol advice, running stress management workshops and mental awareness sessions, and supporting men's sheds. "We have the policies in place but we need to consider ways to link them into a wider strategy."


He added that the impact of mental health in the workplace results in significant costs related to

productivity and absenteeism as well as costs to individuals, families and colleagues.

"It is not only commonsense but also makes sound business sense to adopt an holistic approach to mental health in our industry," he said.

Source: NSW Minerals Council April 2012





Diesel engine exhaust declared carcinogen

In March 2012 a study conducted by the US National Cancer Institute and NIOSH showed an increased risk of death from lung cancer in workers exposed to diesel exhaust. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in June classified diesel engine exhaust as carcinogenic to humans, determining that exposure to diesel exhaust emissions increases the risk for lung and possibly bladder cancer.

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety have reminded readers that most people in everyday life are exposed to some diesel exhaust and have identified a wide range of workers who are at high risk of diesel exhaust exposures.

- toll booth workers
- operators of diesel powered equipment (e.g. trains, trucks, buses, tractors, and forklifts)
- mechanics
- roadside inspection workers
- loading/shipping dock workers
- truck drivers
- farm workers
- railroad workers
- ship crew members

The Centre has suggested using a combination of control measures which will reduce risk.

Interested readers will find these suggestions at www.ccohs.ca/newsletters/hsreport/issues/2012/06/ezine.html

Source: CCOHS Health and Safety Report Vol 10 Issue 6

Diesel exhaust – invisible particles hazardous to health

The CEO of Queensland emissions monitoring and reduction technology developer Peak3 said that the WHO move to classify diesel exhaust as a carcinogen came as no surprise and warned that invisible particles were the most hazardous.

He said that many people associate diesel exhaust 'smoke' with emissions danger but it's not the smoke that is the problem, it is the nanoparticles that are created by diesel engines which are often coated in harmful organic compounds from the fuel and lubricants and are able to penetrate more deeply into the lungs.



Source: OHS Alert June 2012



Staff at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine demonstrate the Cyranose 320 electronic nose

EARLY DETECTION OF MALIGNANT MESOTHELIOMA

In an important breakthrough in the diagnosis of malignant mesothelioma, researchers in NSW have developed a carbon polymer array (CPA) breath test for an electronic nose. The electronic nose recognises specific breath profiles characteristic of different diseases, and can distinguish between patients with lung cancer and controls.

Malignant mesothelioma is a rare tumour which is difficult to diagnose in the early stages. Earlier detection could potentially improve survival.

Current treatments are largely ineffective in controlling the disease. Recently, however, several new drugs have become available and trials are underway to evaluate whether treatment of early disease (including combined surgery and radio-chemotherapy) will improve survival. Ideally, early detection would allow combination therapy to control or eradicate this neoplasm. A reliable, cheap and non-invasive tool for early diagnosis and/or for screening in high-risk populations is urgently needed.

Exhaled breath sampling of volatile organic compounds using a carbon polymer array (CPA) electronic nose recognises specific breath profiles characteristic of different diseases, and can distinguish between patients with lung cancer and controls.

The researchers hypothesised that the CPA electronic nose would detect a breath profile which could accurately distinguish between patients with malignant melanoma, benign asbestos related diseases and healthy control subjects. If this were the case, this could represent a first step towards early detection of malignant mesothelioma in asbestos-exposed subjects.

The electronic nose could eventually translate into a screening tool for high risk populations.

The Cyranose 320, commercialised by Cyrano Sciences, Inc in 2000 and exclusively licensed to Intelligent Optical Systems Inc, was the first major product development, as an efficient, affordable way to perform on-site analysis accurately.

Source: European Respiratory Journal June 2012



Obesity addressed in major study

The Institute of Medicine of the US National Academies has released a major document "Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention – Solving the Weight of the Nation". It addresses the urgent need to develop a plan for accelerating progress in obesity prevention.

An excellent summary which should be essential reading for OHS professionals is available at www.nap.edu.

The Committee offers five recommendations, along with strategies for their implementation, under five overarching goals:

- make physical activity an integral and routine part of life
- create food and beverage environments that ensure that healthy food and beverage options are the routine, easy choice
- transform messages about physical activity and nutrition
- expand the role of health care providers, insurers and employers in obesity prevention
- make schools a national focal point for obesity prevention

The Committee firmly believes that implementing its recommendations is essential to improve and maintain the nation's health.

Source: National Academy of Sciences

Obesity in the workplace – a safety issue!

During the Annual ASSE Safety Convention in the US in June, the associate director of Aon Risk Services, Vicki Missar, described obesity as "an epidemic from the field of ergonomics".

She said that if the current trend continues 86% of the US population will be overweight in 18 years. Of that, 42 per cent of that population will be obese and for professionals in the field of safety it is a major issue.

Increased obesity in the workplace means more arthritis, larger waist circumferences, additional work limitations, compromised grip strength, decreased lower limb mobility and medical risks. Obese employees might be more vulnerable to falls and their manual handling ability may be compromised. Obesity can also impact self-esteem, motivation, absenteeism, presenteeism, premature mortality and more.

Missar advocates approaching the obesity-ergonomics issue from an holistic, wellness-based angle, considering the different obesity types represented in the workplace, assessing weight data and more.

Ergonomists must examine how jobs are designed, communicate with engineers, develop more accurate job designs and ultimately design a plan around the growing and complex problem of an obese workforce.

Source: EHS Today June 2012

IMPROVING HEALTH IN VICTORIAN WORKPLACES

The Victorian Government has launched a \$1.8m program to improve health in Victorian workplaces. The Creating Healthy Workplaces Program includes the release of five international evidence reviews on how stress, gender inequality, alcohol, race-based discrimination and prolonged sitting at work contribute to chronic disease.

Four large state-wide organisations will commence three-year pilot projects to find solutions to prevent workplaces from contributing to ill-health.

Source: VicHealth

EARLY USE OF CANNABIS CAN HAVE LIFE-LONG EFFECTS

Long term, heavy cannabis use is harmful to the developing brain, according to new research conducted by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute based at the Royal Children's Hospital in Victoria.

The study, which was published in the leading neurology journal, *Brain*, found individuals who were heavy cannabis users, who had used for a long period of time, had significant changes in their brains - specifically the areas of brain which connected regions involved in memory function.

Importantly, it also found that the age at which regular cannabis use first began was a key factor in determining the severity of any deterioration in the brain. This study showed that the younger you were when you started, the worse the outcome. Those who started in early adolescence suffered the greatest abnormalities, and experienced greatest cognitive impairment.

The study results suggest that long-term cannabis use is hazardous to white matter in the developing brain. This was especially true for those who had started in adolescence, as we know the brain is still developing during this time.

Source: Murdoch Children's Research Institute

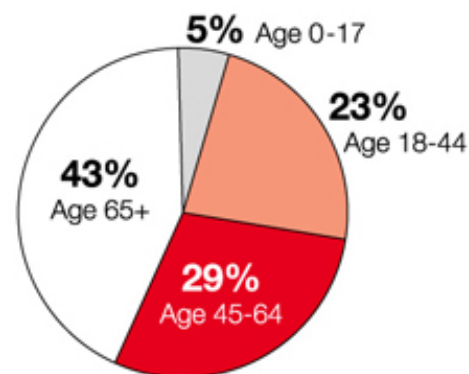


DIABETES AND THE LINKAGE TO HEARING LOSS

Hearing depends on small blood vessels and nerves in the inner ear. Researchers believe that, over time, high blood glucose levels can damage these vessels and nerves, diminishing the ability to hear.

The US National Institute of Health has found that hearing loss is twice as common in people with diabetes as it is in those who don't have the disease.

Who has hearing loss?



Source: <http://ihcrp.georgetown.edu/agingsociety/pdfs/hearing.pdf>

The rate of hearing loss is 30% higher than in those with normal blood sugar.

Most people with hearing loss are younger than 65. Hearing problems can even happen in children.

Source: American Diabetes Association

Lack of sleep linked to incidence of pain

A study, published in the July issue of the American Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, has concluded that sleep deficiency (including short sleep duration and insomnia) is significantly associated with pain and the difficulty of performing tasks.

The researchers conducted a survey of 1,572 hospital patient-care workers and found that 57 per cent reported sleep deficiency and 73 per cent reported pain in the previous three months.

The authors said that although it was known that decreased sleep duration and extended shifts in healthcare workers were linked to workplace injuries the effects of decreased sleep on pain were less clear.

They noted that the study is in agreement with a growing body of research linking poor sleep with pain.

Source: OHS Online, August 2012



BACK INJURIES – MENTAL HEALTH LINKED

New information released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) claims that people with back problems are more likely to report psychological distress and mental disorders than people without back problems.

With lower back injuries high on the list of compensation claims this consequential linkage emphasises the importance of employers addressing the potential for this type of injury occurring in the first place.

In 2007-08 one in 11 Australians had back problems.

A spokesperson for AIHW said that affective mental disorders such as depression are particularly common among people with back disorders. Other associated problems include a poorer quality of life, psychological distress, mental disorders and disability.

Source: AIHW



MARCSTA TRAINING IN BULGARIA

MARCSTA training provider Vlad Doguilev recently travelled to Bulgaria to present the MARCSTA OHS for Supervisors and Managers course.

The exercise required translation of the course material and involvement of local translators in the presentation.

Considerable differences became evident in the safety culture and depth of understanding of safety management systems which have been in place in Australia for some 20 years.

Positive change will no doubt occur over time in Bulgaria.

MARCSTA TRAINING FOR AFRICAN SCHOLARS

In August a group of African scholars attended a MARCSTA Work Health and Safety Induction as part of the WA School of Mines 12 week Australia-Africa Awards Short Course 2012, funded by AusAID.

The course is designed at WASM to provide participants from across Africa with the knowledge, capabilities and networks in key aspects of mining resources regulation and management.

The scholars represented mining ministries and departments from

Cameroon, Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Liberia, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, North Sudan, South Sudan, Senegal, Togo and Uganda

Feedback from the participants was very positive with some indicating that they would endeavour to develop similar programs on their return home.





MANAGING NOISE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

There is growing community concern that exposure to loud sound during everyday leisure activities may be compromising the hearing health of young Australians. Such activities include loud music exposure from personal stereo-players, nightclubs and rock concerts. So, a study was conducted by the National Acoustic Laboratories (NAL) with the primary aim of determining whether there is evidence that exposure to high-level leisure-sound is actually causing hearing problems in the general population of young adult Australians.

Preliminary findings:

- Many respondents believe that leisure noise exposure (personal stereo players, nightclubs) poses a risk to hearing health.
- Respondents tend to perceive their own risk of hearing loss due to leisure noise exposure to be lower than other people their own age.
- A large proportion of people in the target age group report listening to music, personal stereo players (55%), home and car stereos (93.5%) and having attended a nightclub (95.7%).
- Most young adults probably have reasonable (safe) levels of exposure to recreational noise, however, dosimetry reports suggest a minority may be at risk of noise-related damage related to leisure activities.
- While the majority of respondents report sound levels to be high in nightclubs they have attended, only around 25% report ever using hearing protection while attending.
- Almost half of the respondents have never used hearing protectors in any situation.

Most significantly:

- The prevalence of hearing loss in the target group may be lower than reported in previous studies.
- The association between reported leisure noise exposure and hearing loss or inner ear function have been identified in the preliminary analysis.

Data collection will continue until a total number of 1,500 participants have been assessed. More detailed analysis of the data will be carried out when the data collection is complete and additional quality assurance of the data has been done.

Source: Prevalence of hearing loss and its relationship to leisure-sound exposure, June 2011



AROUND THE GLOBE

France

Initial results of occupational risks survey

The conduct of a survey on the medical surveillance of exposure to occupational risks in France is relevant to the Australian environment with model WHS legislation specifying that employers must include health surveillance in their Health Control Plan.

Preliminary results from the French survey, which apply only to private sector workers, show the spread of atypical working hours, reduced autonomy at work and the persistence of physical risks such as noise and exposure to chemicals.

The Health Control Plan under the Australian national model requires a strategy and specific procedures to prevent workers suffering harm to their health as a result of exposure to general health hazards arising at the workplace.

The plan must include:

- noise and vibration
- diesel exhaust fumes
- psychological, psycho-social and biological hazards
- radiation, dusts and welding fumes
- heat and fatigue

Source: HESA May 2012

16 / MONITOR / AUGUST 2012

Japan

Faked dosimeter readings at crippled nuclear plant

A Japanese newspaper reported in July that nine workers covered their personal dosimeters with small lead plates for three hours at the suggestion of a supervisor so they could continue working at the Fukushima nuclear plant last December.

Health, Labour and Welfare Ministry personnel were searching the plant in an attempt to find the discarded lead plates.

It is alleged that workers were threatened with loss of their job if they failed to comply.

Source: OHS Online July 2012

The Netherlands

Workers' Health Education – learning materials for workers' health

A recent initiative by the WHO and Coronel Institute of Occupational Health of the University of Amsterdam to establish an online database of learning materials for safe and healthy work all over the world has commenced with the production of a newsletter promoting the concept.

Full details are available on www.workershealtheducation.org and readers can subscribe for future issues of the newsletter.

Source: Workers' Health Education

NZ

Compulsory nanoscale labelling

The NZ Environmental Protection Agency has raised the bar on the regulation of nanomaterials by making it compulsory to label nanoscale ingredients in cosmetics.

As the level of risk that nanomaterials pose is largely unknown, labelling cosmetics ensures customers will at least have the ability to make informed choices. The decision brings New Zealand into line with pending European cosmetic labelling requirements.

Source: Friends of the Earth Nanotechnology Project

Meanwhile, new groundbreaking research by scientists at Trinity College Dublin has found that exposure to nanoparticles can have a serious impact on health, linking it to rheumatoid arthritis and the development of other serious autoimmune diseases.

Commenting on the findings, Trinity College's Professor of Molecular Medicine, Yuri Volkov, said that the research establishes a clear link between autoimmune diseases and nanoparticles.

Source: Environmental Protection Online June 2012

UK

Air pollution critical to health and longevity

A team of US and British researchers have found what appears to be a correlation between El Nino events and increased deaths due to air pollution by smoke from fires.

After studying the numbers of fires that were set intentionally in South-East Asia to clear forests during El Nino events, as compared to so-called normal years, and the incidence of lung disease leading to deaths in the region, they concluded that up to 15,000 deaths could have resulted from the associated pollutants.

The key message from the study is that the quality of air we breathe is essential to our well-being and our ultimate longevity.

Source: Environmental Protection August 2012

USA

Asthma incidence in the USA rising fast

According to 2010 data from state-by-state data gathered from a US in-depth survey conducted among people with asthma, an estimated 29.1 million adults (12.7%) have been diagnosed with asthma in their lifetimes and 18.7 million (8.2%) still had asthma.

The director of CDC's National Center for Environmental Health, Christopher Portier, said that this information is a stark reminder that asthma continues to be a major public health concern with a large financial impact on families, the nation and health care systems.

Asthma is one of the most lifelong chronic diseases. It affects the lungs, causing repeated episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness and coughing.

During 2001-2010 the proportion of persons with asthma in the US increased by 14.8 per cent.

Source: OHS Online May 2012

Construction industry in the USA

US states with low non-fatal injury rates and high fatality rates tended to be in the south where:

- there are lower workers' compensation benefits
- less unionisation
- lower wages

States with high non-fatal injury rates and lower fatality rates tended to be in the west where:

- there are higher workers' compensation benefits
- higher wages
- strong unionisation
- more workplace inspectors (perhaps regulatory)

Benefits:

Researchers found that more extensive workers' compensation benefits are associated with higher reports of non-fatal injuries largely because such benefits provide more incentive for workers to report injuries.

At the same time costlier premiums provide a stronger incentive for employers to prevent injuries.

Other factors include:

- state legislation which varies from OSHA programs
- difference in labour markets including the role of unions and the level of unemployment and wages
- difference in cultural factors such as habits of compliance with Government regulations

Source: OHS Online May 2012

Australia

Safety Institute of Australia Body of Knowledge

The Body of Knowledge was launched earlier this year. It contains the essential knowledge that the Institute considers a competent generalist OHS professional should possess.

It can be viewed at www.ohsbok.org.au



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All training providers listed provide the General Safety Induction program.

C denotes the Work Safely in the Construction Industry program.
O denotes the OHS for Supervisors and Managers program.
S denotes the Extended Working Hours program.
R denotes Conduct Local Risk Control program
U denotes the Underground program.



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