

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates 2014-2015**

Agency - Safe Work Australia

Department of Employment Question No. EM0786_15

Senator McKenzie provided in writing.

Question

SWA - Work Health and Safety laws

- What steps is the agency taking to ensure individual workers and their employers can better understand the Work Health and Safety Laws?
- Does the Agency believe that providing simpler and easier to understand material will enhance safety? How so?

Answer

- Safe Work Australia believes that providing clear and easy to understand information may enhance safety by assisting employers and workers to identify and control risks to health and safety relevant to their workplaces.
- Safe Work Australia is actively working to facilitate the development of accessible, effective and practical guidance to aid understanding and compliance; minimise regulatory cost; and support improved work health and safety outcomes, particularly for small business and individuals.
- This will be achieved by:
 - revising model codes of practice and guidance material to make them more practical
 - developing and implementing a small business strategy which will identify ways to assist small business to overcome impediments to managing work health and safety, and
 - identifying and pursuing opportunities to support the delivery of nationally consistent messaging and effective resources for small business.

Revising model codes

- Safe Work Australia is currently reviewing some of its codes of practice and guidance material to remove unnecessary duplication and repetition and to make the documents easier to read and understand. Providing material that is practical, clearer and more concise will assist all businesses including small business and individual workers to better understand their obligations under the model Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws.
- As part of this review, Safe Work Australia has revised 12 draft model Codes of Practice.

- In June 2014 Safe Work Australia agreed by majority to publish nine revised packages as national guidance material. The topics are:
 - workplace traffic management
 - managing cash-in-transit security risks
 - industrial lift trucks
 - managing risks in forestry operations
 - amusement devices
 - safe design, manufacture, import and supply of plant
 - working in the vicinity of overhead and underground electric lines
 - formwork and falsework, and
 - scaffolding and scaffolding work.
- Work is continuing to finalise three remaining packages for tree trimming and removal work – crane access method, managing risks of plant in rural workplaces and cranes for further consideration by Safe Work Australia Members.
- Safe Work Australia is also undertaking an evaluation of the impact of the WHS laws. Over the last two years a series of surveys and interviews with businesses of all sizes, health and safety representatives and workers has been conducted.
- In 2014 Safe Work Australia has conducted a series of interviews with sole traders, small and medium sized businesses. The first set of interviews in March in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and New South Wales (NSW) collected feedback from business owner/managers' on their understanding and perceptions of the usefulness of three draft codes of practice. This feedback was used in the review of the draft codes.
- A second set of interviews commenced in May 2014 and is due to be completed in June in NSW, Queensland, South Australia, the Northern Territory, ACT and Tasmania. These interviews are examining how sole traders, small and medium sized businesses are going with adoption of the WHS laws, what is working for them, what is not working for them and their suggestions on what could be done to address any problems.
- Findings from this evaluation work are provided to all Safe Work Australia Members and will be included in the examination of the model work health and safety laws currently underway.

Small Business Strategy

- Safe Work Australia is also developing a small business strategy to assist small employers to understand and comply with the WHS laws. The agency is currently:
 - undertaking a stocktake of material and programs available from work health and safety regulators aimed at assisting small businesses in relation to work health and safety, and
 - examining programs aimed at assisting small business in other areas of regulation.
- The agency will use this information as well as findings from the evaluation research described above to develop a strategy to better reach and assist small

business to understand and comply with work health and safety in ways which are both effective and affordable.

Consistent messaging

- Each October Safe Work Australia Month is held to raise awareness of the importance work health and safety. Throughout safety month, employers and workers are encouraged to hold activities to encourage their colleagues to understand their obligations under the model WHS laws and to identify and address risks in their workplace.