

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Additional Estimates 2013-2014

Agency - Safe Work Australia

Department of Employment Question No. EM0148_14

Senator Back asked on 27 February 2014, Hansard page 34

Question

SWA - Effectiveness of SWA work

CHAIR: I will ask you the same thing I did of the previous agency, and that is that I would like, on notice information, which assures the committee that the work that you are producing is usable and understandable for small businesses and individual employees. Can you take that on board. It is the same question I asked of the last witnesses.

Answer

Safe Work Australia has commenced a number of activities to ensure the work it is producing is usable and understandable for small businesses and individual workers.

A new small business page has been placed on the Safe Work Australia website to provide direct links to guidance material and services for small business developed by work health and safety regulators. This includes advice about programs to assist workers and small businesses understand and comply with the model work health and safety (WHS) laws.

Safe Work Australia has also published short guides specifically for workers, as well as fact sheets and frequently asked questions on key work health and safety issues, such as workplace bullying.

Safe Work Australia is systematically evaluating the model WHS laws and the supporting guidance material. Surveys conducted in 2012 and 2013 with workers and business, including small business, collected information on their perceptions of work health and safety and the cost of compliance. These surveys will be repeated during 2014 to evaluate the impact of the model WHS laws over time.

Model Codes of Practice and all guidance material are currently being revised to ensure they are practical, clear and concise, and meet the needs of small business and individual workers without compromising safety standards or imposing undue regulatory burden.

Safe Work Australia will be conducting small business focus groups and interviews in March and April 2014 to seek views on a sample of revised model codes. Feedback will be sought on whether the codes can be easily understood, are usable and accessible. Further interviews and focus groups will concentrate on the experience of small business in understanding their work health and safety obligations more

generally. This work will be conducted in urban and rural areas and in different types of industries.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has requested a review of the model WHS laws be conducted in 2014. Terms of reference are yet to be agreed for the review however, it is anticipated the review will have a particular focus on reducing red tape and making it easier for small business and workers to understand and comply with the laws. A report is due to be provided to COAG by the end of November 2014.