

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Supplementary Budget Estimates 2016 - 2017

Agency - Safe Work Australia

Department of Employment Question No. EMSQ16-000999

Senator Marshall provided in writing.

Question

SWA - Policy Development to Improve Workplace Health and Safety

Can you update the Committee on the policy development you're undertaking to improve workplace health and safety?

Answer

Safe Work Australia's 2016–17 Operational Plan highlights broad areas of policy that are a focus this year. A key area of policy development is to enhance the model work health and safety laws to improve safety outcomes.

Some major projects to improve workplace health and safety are

- the development of nationally consistent explosives regulation
- implementing the Globally Harmonized System of classification and labelling for chemicals (GHS)
- reviewing the model regulations on diving work
- developing guidance on the storage of hazardous chemicals
- reviewing the guidance on health monitoring of workers who work with specific hazardous chemicals
- reviewing the workplace exposure standards for chemicals
- developing a nationally-consistent licensing framework for high risk work, and
- developing resources for businesses to explain the requirements of the model legislation in relation to mental health, and how to protect workers from work-related psychological harm.

Safe Work Australia also has a program to research and analyse emerging work health and safety issues to identify new priorities and areas for policy development.

The key emerging issues which are the subject of focus are:

- the future of work – the changes to work and workplaces as a result of technological changes, and the implications of these changes for work health and safety
- working in heat, and the implications of more frequent or longer heatwaves, and
- the work health and safety risks faced by some categories of migrant workers.

Following Safe Work Australia's consideration of a report on the health and safety risks to migrant workers last year, the agency has undertaken work to ensure these workers are afforded the same protections under work health and safety laws as all Australian workers. This work includes the development of a plain language information sheet designed to inform migrant workers of their work health and safety rights and responsibilities. The information sheet has been translated into 11 key languages and distributed widely.