



Working Safe Toolkit Launch

Mental Health Coordinating Council

26 November 2010 from 12.00pm – 2.00pm

Ballina RSL Club, 240 River St Ballina NSW

SPEECH by Jenny Thomas

Director Industry Relationships Group, Work Health & Safety Division, WorkCover NSW

Thank you to the Mental Health Coordinating Council for the invitation to launch the *Working Safe* Toolkit on behalf of WorkCover today. Both the Minister for Finance, the Hon. Michael Daley and WorkCover's Chief Executive Officer, Lisa Hunt would like to extend their best wishes for the success of the day.

WorkCover commends the work done to produce such high quality guidance materials and views this as an excellent example of the commitment shown by the sector to improving health & safety outcomes.

Firstly, I would like to share a little information regarding my role in WorkCover.

As the Director of the Industry Relationships Group, I am responsible for 280 staff, including frontline inspectors and support staff, that are located in 23 offices across metropolitan and regional locations in NSW (including an office in beautiful Ballina).

The Group is arranged in four (4) Industry Teams – Public Sector & Community Services (PS&CS), Retail, Wholesale, Consumer & Business Services (RWCABS), Manufacturing, Primary Production, Transport and Storage (MPPTS) and Construction & Utilities Team – and two (2) Regional/country teams – Regional Service Delivery North (from Wyong to the Queensland border & west to Narrabri/ Glen Innes) & Regional Service Delivery South (from Waterfall to the Victorian border, west to the South Australian border & north to the Queensland border).

Contrary to some views, Inspectors are not 'industrial police officers'. In reality, they employ a range of strategies to assist NSW workplaces to improve their OHS management - from the provision of information, education, advice and assistance through to the application of legal sanctions for those who ignore their OHS legislative obligations.

Our main role is to work with industry and workplaces in ways that meet their particular needs, to make sure that everyone in the workplace returns safely home from work.

That's why in familiarising myself with the Toolkit, I was very impressed with its comprehensive nature and also with the clarity and ease of its practical application in workplace. Again, I applaud the working group for their efforts.

Information provision assists in raising awareness of people's OHS obligations and these guidance materials are a fine example of practical assistance.

But we should never be complacent about safety at work.

As a reminder, there have been seven (7) fatalities in this financial year in NSW ie since July 1 2010. That means that 7 families and a multitude of workmates & friends are grieving the loss of a father, husband, brother, friend or colleague.

Fortuitously, there are no recorded fatalities this financial year within the Health & Community Services Sector.

This information reminds us that we need to remain vigilant in managing health and safety risks and as circumstances change, for example consumers, staff and environment – we need to ensure that communication, information sharing, risk awareness and risk review continue to be at front of mind.

Increasingly, workers compensation premiums often place a strain on resources in community and non-Government organisations - but as well all know - prevention is better than cure. So maintaining a prevention focus is paramount.

WorkCover NSW is happy to work with community services and the mental health sector to share experiences and lessons to build our understanding of the challenges faced by the sector and how we can assist you to manage current and emerging risks.

A particular challenge ahead of NSW workplaces in the coming years is the introduction of national Work Health and Safety legislation by January 2012. Some of the important

points are a broadening of duty holders under the legislation – Persons Conducting Business Undertakings (PCBU's) rather than employers employees and workplaces (geographical basis), consultation arrangements with the enshrining of Health and Safety Representatives (HSR's) in legislation and positive duties placed on those in control of work activities - due diligence.

However, the basics of the keeping your workplace safe remain the same. Those basics are making safety a priority, everyone having a say about safety, identifying and controlling risks and giving workers the training and supervision they need. If you comply with current laws then you are well on your way to meeting the new requirements.

As you would be aware, New South Wales wants to keep some aspects of the current OHS laws, for example - relating to prosecutions.

NSW remains committed to effective Work Health and Safety requirements for all Australian workers and employers.

You can have a say on specific details affecting your industry or sector during a four-month public comment period which commences in December 2010 – details can be found by visiting the SafeWork Australia website at

<http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/Legislation/Pages/ModelWHSLegislation.aspx>

WorkCover is also here to help you get ready!

Further information can be found at www.workcover.nsw.gov.au .

Thank you for the opportunity to launch the toolkit today & we look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with the mental health sector in the coming months.

