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Independent Taskforce on Workplace Health and Safety

By email: [secretariat@hstaskforce.govt.nz](mailto:secretariat@hstaskforce.govt.nz)

### **Submission on the Workplace Health and Safety Review**

This document is submitted on behalf of The Manufacturing Council of the New Zealand Amalgamated Engineering Printing and Manufacturing Union. This council oversees and is responsible for the strategic work undertaken by our union on behalf of our Manufacturing members. We represent 7206 union members in the Manufacturing Industry.

### **Concerns regarding Health and Safety outcomes in Manufacturing**

Manufacturing is one of the industries with the highest rates of serious injury to workers, and ACC data shows 107 deaths occurred in the sector between 2002 and 2009. During 2009-2010 ACC claims from the manufacturing industry accounted for almost 20% of all claims. In response to this, the Manufacturing Sector Action plan to 2013 was developed to prevent injury and death. One of the key priorities includes safer use and design of machinery.

The Safe Use of Machinery project aims to reduce the number of people being injured or killed because of unguarded or inadequately guarded machinery, yet the trend continues one tragedy a time as the recent MoBIE press release headlines will attest:

- Winstone Pulp fined \$29,000 for unguarded saw - 7 Sep 2012
- Kerikeri conveyor accident highlights importance of machine guarding - 6 Aug 2012
- Arm amputation accident highlights importance of machine guarding - 30 Jul 2012
- Sawmill company fined \$20,000 after worker trapped in unguarded machine - 17 Jul 2012
- Taranaki company fined \$60,000 after employee seriously injured by sawmill - 6 Jul 2012

Unsafe machinery is clearly a huge issue for our members and the issue is exacerbated in the current financial environment, where machine maintenance and timely replacement are lower down on employer priority lists.

The recessionary conditions in our sector are such that employers look to save on labour cost wherever they can. This often means 'sinking lid policies' and reduced staffing policies are being enforced on our sites. The result of such policies is low manning levels for machine operators who often report having to operate more than one machine at a time. This causes several hazards;

- Stress and fatigue
- Not being able to take breaks
- Not being able to take time off when necessary for illness, training or annual leave
- Increased likelihood of accidents caused by lack of attention to a machine

Linked to this issue is the issue of precarious work. Our members who are employed by the 98 companies covered by our Metals and Manufacturing Industry Agreement were surveyed this year 28 groups of employees of those small to medium sized enterprises reported having casuals, temporary employees and/or contract employees working on site. We are seeing increasing levels of

precarious workers employed on the sites we cover. Precarious workers are often not employed by the company where they are working; they are less trained and less experienced than permanent employees. What this means for our members is that they are often working alongside new workers who are unfamiliar with the work and who lack training.

Our members who are health and safety representatives also complain that issues such as the above are continually raised and reported through health and safety committee meetings but are never addressed.

Many of our members who take health and safety training through providers other than the NZCTU are not aware of their rights in this situation. Even when they are aware, our members do not feel safe enforcing their right to issue hazard notices to their employers for fear of unfair and unlawful retribution.

**We therefore present the following recommendations for the consideration of the Independent Taskforce on Workplace Health and Safety:**

- That safe manning levels for machine operators be established in industry sub-sectors and are enforceable by manufacturing workers.
- That New Zealand adopts more prescriptive regulation in regard to machine guarding and heavy lifting rather than relying on self-regulation.
- That it should be a criminal offence to obstruct health and safety representatives who are carrying out their duties.
- That Union Officials should be able to issue hazard notices to employers as they are not employed by them and would have no fear of retribution.
- That New Zealand begins to address the issue of non-standard and precarious work by measuring the number of workers employed in these types of work, as is done in other countries.

Thank you for your consideration,

Steven Joy

Industry Council Convenor  
Manufacturing Council  
New Zealand Amalgamated Engineering Printing and Manufacturing Union