
From:
Sent: Thursday, 20 September 2012 10:44 a.m.
To: Secretariat Taskforce
Subject: Enforcement of Workplace Health and Safety

Dear Taskforce Members

I wish to make a submission on one aspect only of Workplace Health and Safety: Enforcement.

Credentials

I am an audiologist with ~43 years' experience. I also have degrees in psychology. I was 20 years in the Department of Health developing hearing and deafness services and worked closely with Health and Labour Inspectors and Occupational Health Nurses on hearing conservation policy, training and health education. I have been involved in development of ACC policy on hearing periodically since its inception. I was a founding partner of Health and Safety company WorkHealth. I have participated in many forums on health and safety. In the private sector I established and managed Phonak New Zealand Ltd, part of the Swiss Sonova group, growing it to a \$25m turnover company with 45 staff.

Background

I observed health and safety knowledge and compliance decline with the legislation which transferred responsibility to employers. It was not the transfer of responsibility per se that was so damaging, but the concomitant decommissioning of the public sector occupational health workforce. Health and Safety Inspectors and Occupational Health Nurses previously visited businesses regularly, inspecting, carrying out health checks, educating, and occasionally prosecuting. Overseas visitors were impressed at compliance levels in New Zealand. Once the regular visits stopped some employers did the minimum necessary to comply on paper with the legislation. The main exceptions were very large companies, sometimes part of international businesses, with their own codes and their own health and safety departments.

Submission

Human society unfortunately does not function well without law enforcement and sanctions for infringement. Imagine the effect on road rule compliance if police and intersection and speed cameras were withdrawn from New Zealand roads. That's what happened with health and safety. Whilst most of us endeavour to be socially responsible and law-abiding, our compliance with speed limits and drink-drive rules is nonetheless influenced significantly by the presence of police, booze buses, cameras and the threat of prosecution.

Health and safety is no different. Whilst policies, standards and education are also critical, I simply do not believe that we will significantly improve our tragic health and safety record without dramatically increasing the presence of independent monitoring and enforcement personnel in the workplace.

I wish you well with your important task.

Kind regards

Bill Keith

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