

5 November 2012

Robert Jager  
Chairperson  
Independent Taskforce on Workplace Health and Safety

Dear Robert

I am writing as a semi-retired, independent maintenance engineering consultant to give my input to the Taskforce. My authority for doing so arises from my 50 years experience managing industrial plant engineering and maintenance in several countries and industries ranging through mining, hydrocarbon processing, pulp and paper production, meat processing, and heavy production engineering management, and maintenance consulting. During my lifetime I have worked under the Department of Labour regulations, and latterly the OSH Act – the latter in both New Zealand and its equivalent in Canada while employed in the tarsands industry in Alberta. I have been a member of, and also chaired the Health and Safety committee at a number of NZ industrial company's.

Rather than attempting to input into all the many areas within your submission template, I will concentrate on those areas where I have had extensive front-line experience, both as a practising engineering manager, and as a maintenance management consultant.

#### H&S Inspectors.

Since the introduction of the HSE Act in 1992, there has been a gradual change in the exposure of the OSH Inspectors to on-the-ground inspections on companies practises as they relate to the OSH Regulations. Prior to 1992, inspections by the DOL were far more commonplace then after the implementation of the HSE Act with its much greater emphasis on employer safety management. This included the free loan of a large number of safety related films from the DOL. However, there was too great a swing from proactive inspections with the DOL, to reactive visits from OSH as a result of serious accidents. This has resulted in an ethos of companies concealing reportable incidents in order to avoid the often heavy and reactive hand of an OSH Inspector. There is often a sense of fear within companies that a visit by an OSH Inspector will result in a penalty of some sort. It is rare indeed to see such a visit as a proactive act to work with the company co-operatively to improve health and safety.

Such a view is not necessarily due to a lack of training of the OSH Inspectors. It is more usually a deliberate OSH policy to act as "policemen" because they have all the power of the Act behind them.

I have seen several examples of this type of conflict between parties over the years, and it is not improving.

#### Suggestions:

- There needs to be a widespread, top-down philosophical change within OSH to move from reactive conflict, to proactive co-operation with client companies, with a consequential diminishment of confrontation.
- There needs to be a considerable increase in the number of OSH Inspectors making more widespread visits to company's on the ground.

## Secondary Schools, Polytechs and Universities

Training in Health and Safety at all levels within the New Zealand Education system is practically non-existent. Lip-service only is paid to teaching and testing knowledge of the HSE Act. I have seen this "teaching" of health and safety first hand within NZ secondary schools and quite frankly it is a non-event. Additionally, Technology students have to work in school workshops that fail to meet industry standards on many counts, so students come to accept that such conditions are "safe" when in fact they are not safe. For example, inadequate machinery lighting, close, unsafe crowding of machines, insufficient working bench space, many tripping hazards in school workshops through allowing the students to build overly-large projects. The failure to adequately teach young students safe work practices while at school, or Polytech or University means the task is very much harder in the workplace. This does result in accidents due to an inherent lack of "working safely" knowledge amongst new employees. We spend many hours teaching work skills in order to achieve high quality output so that such quality standards become "second nature", but we do not teach people to "work safe" in the same manner. Why not?

Within NZ, we have many excellent Codes and Standards for the construction and operation of machinery, e.g. machinery guards, conveyor guards, scaffolding, etc. but we do not "teach" these codes and standards as a part of Health and Safety training, as standard practice. Why not?

Suggested:

- Develop multi-level external exams (not NZQA Unit Standards) to teach Health and Safety in the Workplace in secondary schools, Polytechnics and Universities as mandatory subjects. Such exam curricula should go well beyond the current predilection to teach only the bare fundamentals of the Act – usually the \$ payable by employee and employer if convicted in court of non-compliance with the Act.
- Ensure that the monitoring of secondary schools, Polytechnics and Universities by OSH Inspectors becomes part of their normal work. (Currently this is not done).

OSH Inspectors have a considerable de jure power stemming from the HSE Act, but they are not monitored for adherence to that Act, nor gainfully working with client company's to improve Health and Safety in the Workplace.

I have briefly touched on the areas of Health and Safety with which I am most familiar, however, I also have views on other areas but time precludes reporting on these at this time.

I would personally have a strong interest in such a monitoring role if an outcome from the Taskforce was the development of such a position.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Hislop

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