



New research: Australians want workplace safety rights protected under new OHS laws

A new national poll has revealed eight out of ten Australians (78%) believe employers should do more to protect the health and safety of their workers, even if it means more costs or red tape for their business.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said it was clear the State, Territory and Federal Governments were not doing enough to consult workers on proposed changes to health and safety laws.

The poll finds nearly seven out of ten workers (67%) are not aware that the governments are working together to standardise the nation's occupational health and safety laws.

Workers will hold a series of rallies and events across the country today (Tuesday 1 Sept.) calling on Federal and State Governments to oppose the watering down of existing workplace safety rights.

"Unions are concerned the proposed new national workplace health and safety laws will reduce the existing rights and protections for many Australian workers," said Mr Lawrence.

"The proposed new laws will reduce the power of employees while giving greater power to employers but the Australian public has made it clear they don't want that," Mr Lawrence said.

"It is essential that the Federal Government does not cave in to pressure from major employers and business lobby groups on this fundamental issue for workers.

"There is significant support in the Australian community for stronger rights and protections for workers and an ongoing role for unions in checking workplaces where employees are worried there are safety dangers.

"The poll finds 81 per cent of those surveyed agreed workers should have the right to call in help from a union to check on health and safety issues regardless of their employer's approval.

"There is also strong public resistance to moves by employers to deny injured workers the right to prosecute employers under workplace health and safety laws.

"Seven out of ten Australians (69%) believe that injured workers should be able to take their employer to court under workplace health and safety laws.

"Workplace safety is a priority issue. The death toll from workplace disease and injury is estimated to be more than four times the annual road toll. More needs to be done to reduce the cost to society of workplace illness, injury and death and that must start with best-practice national OHS laws.

"The Federal Government was elected on a commitment to protect the rights of working people. Any reduction of health and safety in the workplace would breach that commitment and undermine improvements in other areas of Federal IR laws to strengthen workers' rights," Mr Lawrence said.

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