

Deaths of young workers show Home Insulation Program needs much tighter safety and training

The deaths of young workers installing home insulation are unacceptable and the program should be halted until it can be demonstrated to unions that much tighter safety and training standards are in place to properly protect workers.

Unions have consistently raised concerns about safety and training standards in the program and have complained directly to the Federal Government.

The ACTU called for a halt to the program in November 2009 after three tragic deaths but withdrew our call following assurances that new procedures would protect workers.

The electrocution of another young worker clearly shows that these new procedures were not sufficient, said ACTU President Sharan Burrow.

“The Home Insulation Program has not been up to scratch and four young Australians have paid for its failings with their lives.

“From the outset, unions have called for improved safety standards, better training to ensure workers are able to identify risks such as faulty wiring, and a bigger role for qualified tradespeople such as electricians to oversee the work.

“Any recently installed insulation that does not meet acceptable standards of quality, workmanship or safety to the public needs to be re-examined.

“Shonky operators that have put lives at risk and ripped off the taxpayer should be prosecuted and driven out of the industry.

“The program is due to run for another two years, funding the insulation of more than 2 million homes and there has been a flood of new companies rushing to take advantage of the multi billion dollar program.

“Unions recognise that this and other Federal Government stimulus and infrastructure investment programs are important to save jobs and help the economy recover from the Global Financial Crisis.

“But unions have said from the outset that businesses that get stimulus funding from the Government must respect the rights of their workers, provide adequate training and ensure a safe workplace,” said Ms Burrow.

“Other programs, including the upgrades to schools as part of the Building the Education Revolution investment program, also need to be carefully monitored to ensure there are adequate health and safety and training standards to protect workers.

“It is also essential that Australian workers have the highest possible legal protection and that employers face a rigorous enforcement regime under the Government’s proposed new national health and safety laws,” said Ms Burrow.

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