

Thursday, 19 December 2019

Laws must adapt to keep workers safe in changing climate

OHS laws which are designed to keep workers safe at work need to be updated to deal with the reality of climate change, which will mean hotter days and more bushfires, resulting in conditions which are hazardous to workers, especially those who work outside.

Nearly one in four Australian workers spend part of their day outside, and they need national standards to ensure that they are not forced to work in dangerous heat or when the air quality is dangerous to human health, as it has been frequently in recent weeks.

In the last week, the ACTU has released two safety alerts, one regarding smoke and one regarding heat, we call on the Morrison Government to act urgently to implement new regulations to protect workers from these hazards

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

“All workers are entitled to be safe and healthy at work. Global warming will mean hotter temperatures as well as more bushfires. This is already affecting working people, especially those who work outside.

“The Morrison Government has been missing in action as the current bushfire emergency has developed, but action is needed now to make sure that our workplace health and safety regulations are fit for purpose in a changing Australian climate.

“The levels of smoke we have seen on the East coast in recent weeks has been more than ten times the hazardous level, but we have seen reports of workers being ordered to keep working. This is completely unacceptable. No worker should be forced to work in dangerous conditions, regardless of what industry they are in or what work they do.

“We have distributed new OHS advice relating to heat and smoke exposure to all Australian unions and Trade and Labour Councils, but we need action from the Morrison Government to ensure that all Australian workers are safe at work.

“The Government could move immediately to include these new regulations in OHS law, protecting Australian workers from the damaging effects of global warming.”

Media contact: Peter Green 0400 764 200