

Wednesday, 14 March 2012

## Unacceptable cost of workplace injuries and diseases is sapping 5% from economic growth: unions

It is workers, not employers, who overwhelmingly bear the costs of workplace injuries and diseases, a new report has shown.

The report by Safe Work Australia revealed that three-quarters of the costs of workplace injuries and diseases is borne by the injured workers themselves, including loss of current and future income and non-compensated medical expenses.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said the cost of \$60.6 billion for workplace injuries and diseases in the 2008-9 financial year was far too high.

"We think we are a clever country but it isn't so smart to forgo almost 5% of our nation's GDP on the cost of preventable workplace injury and illness," Ms Kearney said.

Safe Work Australia has estimated that the cost of workplace injury and disease to workers, their employers and the community for the 2008-09 financial year was \$60.6 billion. Injured workers themselves bear 74% of this cost, including loss of current and future income and non-compensated medical expenses. Twenty-one per cent of the cost is borne by the community and the rest (5%) is borne by employers.

The Safe Work Australia Report details that the workplace injury costs to employers includes loss of productivity from absent workers, recruitment and retraining costs and fines and penalties from breaches of work health and safety regulations.

"This report has found that the cost of each workplace incident is around \$99,100 and of this workers pay \$73,300, the community \$20,800 and employers \$5100," Ms Kearney said.

"There are some valuable insights from this report. Employers could get a \$3 billion boost to productivity by preventing workplace accidents and incidents. Given that the majority of the cost of injuries is borne by workers, all governments need to look closely at these figures when they consider the adequacy of workers' compensation payments."

Safe Work Australia has also released figures on work related deaths for 2009-10. In 2009-10 337 people died in Australia from a work-related traumatic injury.

"Australia records a traumatic workplace death at the rate of almost one per day, which is an appalling figure. Every single one of these deaths is a tragedy," Ms Kearney said.

"The effect of these deaths on families, communities and workplaces cannot be measured. Workplace deaths are not the collateral damage of progress. We need to clean up our act."

It is horrifying that 42 deaths were of bystanders not directly involved in the work processes that ultimately killed them. Fifteen of these deaths were on children under 15 years of age.

Ms Kearney encouraged workers to become involved in making their workplace safer by electing health and safety representatives joining their workplace health and safety committee, and by seeking advice from their union. Workers can get more information at [safeatwork.org.au](http://safeatwork.org.au)

**Media contact: Rebecca Tucker (03) 9664 7359 or 0408 031 269;**  
[rtucker@actu.org.au](mailto:rtucker@actu.org.au)