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## Business push to water down OHS laws would jeopardise workers' safety, say unions

International Workers' Memorial Day is a solemn reminder why Australia's workplace health and safety laws must not be weakened simply to appease employers, say unions.

"On the day we remember the 7000 workers who die from workplace accidents or disease each year, the last thing we should be concerned with is making laws less rigorous in the interests of employers," ACTU President Ged Kearney said.

"We owe it to the memories of grieving loved ones, friends and workmates not to allow employers to weaken OHS laws and regulations to suit their bottom line.

"Unions, community groups and relatives of those killed at or because of work will gather at rallies and memorial events around Australia today as part of a global event to mourn the dead and fight for the living.

"This year's global theme is unions combine with strong laws and tough enforcement to make work safer. The theme has never been more relevant than right now, as self-interested business groups seek to water down the proposed new national health and safety regulations.

"When the Government last year released its draft legislation, which will harmonise nine jurisdictions' sets of health and safety laws into one national set of rules, it was welcomed by the same business groups that are now complaining the laws are too onerous.

"In the past these business groups have complained about the separate state and territory laws. Even though they got what they wanted, they now want to reduce workplace safety further."

But Ms Kearney said workers shouldn't be surprised business and industry wanted to water down the laws given the following quote from an Australian Industry Group 2008 publication:

*'It is often suggested that OHS should be the top priority. While this is a worthy ideal every organisation should strive for, the reality is that making a profit will always be the highest priority of a business.'*

"I challenge those business groups to go to one of the memorial events across the country today and tell a grieving widow that the paperwork that would have kept their loved one alive is too onerous," Ms Kearney said.

However, Ms Kearney said unions themselves have concerns that draft health and safety laws could expose more workers to danger.

"Unions don't think they are tough enough. Every three minutes someone in Australia is injured seriously enough to lodge a worker's compensation claim. The economic cost of work-related injuries and illnesses is more than \$50 billion a year," she said. "But you cannot put a value on saving a human life and any push by business to do so is deeply concerning."

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