

Thursday, 10 November 2011

Barnett Government will leave WA workers with second rate health and safety, say unions

West Australian workers are calling on the Barnett Government not to leave them with second rate safety by ignoring the national harmonisation of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) laws.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said workers in WA should have the same OHS standards and protections as in other states and territories, but would be left behind by the Barnett Government's stubborn refusal to join the new uniform OHS system that will begin on 1 January.

Ms Kearney will today present a petition to Opposition Leader Eric Ripper on behalf of workers calling for the strongest possible health and safety laws in WA.

"West Australian workers and their families deserve the same standard of workplace safety as workers in the rest of Australia," Ms Kearney said.

"It makes no sense for WA to have lower standards and protections than the rest of the nation."

Ms Kearney said a WA worker was killed almost every two weeks, while someone was seriously injured at work every 30 minutes, yet the State Government's refusal to legislate for safety showed a complete lack of value for their lives.

The WA Government is yet to release its draft harmonisation legislation but has stated it will not sign up to five key points of the new national laws, including an increase in the maximum penalty for negligent employers to \$3 million.

Ms Kearney said WA should sign up to an OHS system which:

- Allows trained Health and Safety Representatives to direct work to stop when they see a serious and imminent safety problem;
- Protects workers from discrimination for raising health and safety issues.
- Enables the family or union of someone killed at work to initiate a prosecution against the employer if the state WorkSafe authority declines to.
- Enables workers' union representatives to have timely access to a workplace to provide important advice when it is needed.

The handing over of the petition will take place at 9am on the steps of Parliament House in Perth.

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