

Monday, 12 October 2020

183 deaths at work in 2019, first increase in more than a decade

Data released today by Safe Work Australia tracking workplace injuries and fatalities in 2019 shows the rate of workplace deaths increasing for the first time since 2007 as the Morrison Government continues to drag its feet on work health and safety reform.

183 workers died during 2019, 38 more than in 2018, with the biggest increases coming in transport (58 compared to 38) and across NSW (61 compared to 47).

The increase in transport likely downplays the horrific rates of injury and death for delivery workers in the gig economy as many work-related deaths which occur on our roads are counted as traffic accidents, rather than workplace fatalities.

The data also shows the rate of claims through workers' compensation for serious injuries increasing in agriculture, manufacturing, transport and logistics as well as health, community, and personal services.

The Morrison Government is yet to act on the recommendations of a 2018 review of national WHS legislation which recommended industrial manslaughter provisions which would hold employers responsible where they cause the deaths of working people and regulations governing psychological injury and ill health which would mean factors contributing to mental illness in the workplace would be treated like physical hazards.

The delay is making workplaces less safe. Governments could also act immediately to accurately track deaths and injuries in transport and logistics like what was recently introduced in Victoria.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien:

"Every worker has the right to go to work and come home safe. Sadly, this data shows the appalling toll of Government inaction on workplace health and safety. Nearly 4 deaths every week while the Morrison Government talked up economic growth before the pandemic.

"Every death at work is preventable.

"The Morrison Government has been sitting on recommendations from the national WHS Review for 2 years. That inaction has made Australian workplaces less safe, and it has caused the first increase in workplace deaths in more than 10 years.

"The rates of injury and death in the transport sector, in no small part due to the appalling conditions faced by delivery workers in the gig economy, is a national disaster. More than one worker a week died in transport alone in 2019.

"The pandemic has exposed the systemic issues facing workers in health and community services, and this data shows the human cost of those failings did not begin with the virus. Claims for serious injuries, requiring more than a week away from work, increased in health and community services, continuing an upward trend which has been ignored by the federal government for years.

"By refusing to act to make workplaces safer the Morrison Government is allowing more preventable injuries and deaths. We call on the government to act immediately and adopt all of the recommendations."

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