



Australian Council of Trade Unions

## MEDIA RELEASE

Embargo to 1am, Wednesday, 28 October 2009

# Time is running out for stronger health and safety laws: workers rally for changes

Thousands of workers will hold protest meetings in Sydney and Melbourne today to push for stronger workplace health and safety laws so that fewer workers are injured or killed.

Unions are concerned that time is running out to prevent governments from caving in to a big business agenda to cut red tape at the expense of workers' health and safety.

The meetings are part of an urgent attempt by workers and unions to change draft health and safety laws before the public comment period ends in two weeks (November 9).

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said draft laws circulated in September would put workers at risk of lower safety standards. He said unions were determined to campaign for improvements to the proposed laws to ensure they raised standards, not lowered them.

"A once-in-a-generation opportunity to lift protections for workers by achieving the world's best safety standards for the entire country is in danger of being missed," Mr Lawrence said.

"As they stand, the draft laws are about taking away protections and rights for workers, rather than lifting the overall standard. We are determined to make sure politicians take notice of workers' concerns."

In Melbourne, a lunchtime rally will be held during the annual Victorian OHS Health and Safety Representatives Conference at the Melbourne Convention Centre, attended by more than 1000 people.

Mr Lawrence said one of the main concerns was that the new laws would diminish the rights, powers and protections of health and safety representatives (HSRs) in workplaces.

They will make it harder for HSRs to do their job of protecting their workmates.

"Health and safety reps play a crucial role in preventing workplace accidents and incidents. They need the power to be proactive, not just called in as a last resort," he said.

Unions also want to ensure that victims have the right to prosecute and that employers are held responsible for providing a safe and healthy workplace.

"Under the proposed laws, a decision by the regulator not to prosecute a breach of the laws means that the law is not enforced," Mr Lawrence said.

"Unions believe victims should be able to enforce safety laws where the regulator fails to do so. Union initiated prosecutions in NSW have led to improvements in safety standards in workplaces as diverse as banks and schools."

### **Rally details – Wednesday, 28 October**

**MELBOURNE – 1pm, Melbourne Exhibition Centre, South Wharf (near Polly Woodside)**

**SYDNEY – 12.30pm, Martin Place, between Phillip and Macquarie streets (media contact: Nick Lucchinelli, Unions NSW, ph 0422 229 032)**

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