

1 September 2014

Use lessons of Home Insulation Program to ensure fatalities never happen again

The ACTU urges all levels of Government to act on the findings of the Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program to ensure the failings that led to workplace deaths are never repeated.

ACTU Assistant Secretary Michael Borowick said it was essential that reforms are put in place to ensure workers' safety is a first order issue in the development and implementation of all future Government projects.

"Every worker deserves to return home safely at the end of each day," Mr Borowick said.

"Workers should not have to pay the cost of unsafe workplaces and these workers paid the highest price.

"There is no room for failure in the Government's response - it is critical that workplace safety does not fall between the cracks of responsibility between the Commonwealth and the States on big nation building projects such as the Home Insulation scheme.

"It is disappointing that the Royal Commission has missed an opportunity to make specific recommendations on how best this can be dealt with in the future as well as addressing how legislation and regulation can be improved to increase worker safety.

"Unions want stronger regulation to save lives, and we want to see penalties increased where employers fail to provide adequate training and supervision.

"The ACTU had hoped the Royal Commission would recommend the introduction of Industrial Manslaughter laws which have the potential to change community attitudes around criminally reckless negligence at work and ultimately reduce workplace deaths.

"The Royal Commission was a missed opportunity in terms of identifying ways of improving the occupational health and safety of workers employed by small business. Had the Royal Commission made recommendations on this subject, then the Commission would have had some enduring benefit and not been simply a way of discrediting the former Government."

Mr Borowick also called for increased resources and support for state regulators.

"It is extremely worrying that we are seeing State Governments in Victoria and Queensland seek to dilute the power and influence of workplace safety regulators by starving them of resources," Mr Borowick said.

"The failings of the Home Insulation Program show the devastating cost of an inadequately resourced workplace safety regime."

Mr Borowick said the Abbott Government's support to weaken State occupational health and safety laws through changes to the model OH&S Act was a disgrace.

"The Abbott Government calls workplace safety 'red tape' – we call it saving lives," Mr Borowick said.

"Safety must be made mandatory through regulation. Safety must be law. We

need to lift workplace health and safety standards for all workers, not reduce them.”

Mr Borowick also called on the Federal Government to categorically rule out abolishing Safe Work Australia as recommended by the Commission of Audit.

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