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National survey exposes safety crisis in offshore oil and gas

Australian offshore oil and gas workers face higher injury rates than onshore workers, according to a national survey of workers operating long shifts in some of the most remote and hazardous environments.

A survey of 500 oil and gas workers found they were exposed to physical hazards at eight times the rate of onshore workers, and more than half had sustained at least one injury in the past 12 months.

Offshore workers reported higher rates of exposure to dangerous substances: 38% had been exposed to lead and 34% to asbestos.

One in four offshore workers were pressured by management not to report health and safety issues at work, with 75% fearing that raising a concern could cost them their job. Of those who reported injuries, only one in five lodged a workers' compensation claim.

One in four offshore workers reported their employer did not follow its own safety policies – a rate 2.5 times higher than the onshore Australian workforce.

The Albanese Government has committed to reviewing offshore health and safety laws later this year, and Australian Unions are pushing for Australia's onshore health and safety laws to be extended to cover all Australian workers on offshore oil and gas projects, including those crewing ships under the flag of foreign countries.

Workers offshore currently have some of the weakest safety protections of all Australian workers. Oil and gas companies can write their own safety procedures and pick and choose which standards to follow.

Unions will press for common safety stands on and offshore and higher penalties for offshore companies found guilty of safety breaches, such as industrial manslaughter after workplace deaths.

If a worker is killed through gross negligence onshore, companies face penalties of up to \$20 million. If the same death occurs offshore, there is no industrial manslaughter charge, and maximum penalties are capped at just 6% of the penalties applying onshore.

The survey of offshore oil and gas workers was conducted by the ACTU, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, the Australian Workers' Union and the Maritime Union of Australia.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary, Liam O'Brien:

"Today's data shows that the offshore oil and gas workers are getting injured on the job at alarming rates and suffering in a culture of silence, including management pressure not to report safety issues.

"Under our current laws, health and safety protections on land disappear the moment you work on an offshore oil and gas platform. These workers operate in hazardous environments hundreds of kilometres from the nearest hospital, yet they have fewer legal protections than someone working down the road from one.

"Some of the world's most profitable multinational companies operate Australian oil and gas platforms, including Woodside, Shell and Santos. They are extracting huge windfall profits from our sovereign oil and gas resources, yet the workers out on remote platforms have the lowest safety protections in the country.

"The Albanese Government must close the gap between the safety rights of onshore and offshore workers, so all Australians have the same rights, and wealthy multi-nationals don't get discounted financial penalties when workers are killed and injured through negligence offshore.

“Allowing multinationals to write their own safety rules, choose which laws to follow, and then pressure workers not to report safety risks is not going to cut it any longer for Australian workers in this critical sector who, if anything, deserve stronger protections where the risks demand it.”

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