SafetySuite Newsletter Issue 26 May-June 2006

The Net

From The Editor

Binge drinking affects workers and workplace safety

A new report released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), shows 17% percent of workers had a binge-drinking episode at least once a month that placed them at risk of harm, including injury or death, and 9% of workers had such an episode at least weekly.

The report, Alcohol and Work - patterns of use, workplace culture and safety, looks at previously unexamined aspects of the 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey and highlights the strong links between alcohol use and adverse workplace events, such as absenteeism and attending work under the influence of alcohol.

The report shows that nearly 7% of the workforce had attended work while under the influence of alcohol at least once in a 12 month period.

Nearly 4% of the workforce had at least one day off work in a three month period because of alcohol use, with drinkers who regularly consumed high levels of alcohol up to 19 times more likely to have taken a day off work than workers who drank at low risk levels.

The report found high levels of both regular and binge drinking in particular industries and occupational groups.

Report author Dr Ken Pidd of the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, said women in the paid workforce were more likely then men to drink alcohol at levels that placed them at risk of long-term harm to their health. And female managers and supervisors were more likely to drink on a weekly basis than their male counterparts.

'Hospitality industry workers were more likely than those in other industries to regularly consume high levels of alcohol and were more at risk for long-term harm to their health,' Dr Pidd said.

High levels of workplace abuse or intimidation by persons affected by

alcohol were also found in certain occupations and industries.

Nearly 14% of all reported incidents of 'being put in fear by a person under the influence of alcohol' occurred in the workplace. This was particularly true for workers employed in the health services, for whom 42% of all such events occurred in the workplace.

The report provides essential information for developing relevant policies and interventions related to alcohol in the workplace, and it identifies workforce development strategies to address work-related alcohol problems.

Further information: Dr Ken Pidd, National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, tel. 08 8201 7692.

Ed.

28 June 2006
Publications Officer, AIHW, tel 61 2 6244 1032
http://www.aihw.gov.au/mediacentre/2006/mr20060628.cfm

Special Interest:

- Terrifying lift plunges reported in two city towers
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Terrifying lift plunges reported in two city towers

A UNION has called for tighter regulation of lift maintenance after two men came forward yesterday with stories of terrifying experiences in major city buildings.

Chef Glenn Rochester was in a goods lift at the Sofitel Hotel on Collins Street last Monday when a counterweight, estimated to weigh two tonnes, snapped off and plummeted to the bottom of the lift shaft, causing the lift to drop before safety brakes kicked in. Mr Rochester said he fell 15 floors and suffered back and arm injuries.

In February, David Anesbury was in a lift in the Sofitel's twin building, occupied by ANZ Bank, that fell up to 15 floors, leaving occupants distressed and visibly shaken.

The incident at the Sofitel is being investigated by WorkSafe, building owner AMP Capital Investors and Kone, the maker of the lift. A spokesman for WorkSafe said he was unaware how Mr Rochester had calculated the number of floors he fell, given that he began his journey on the below ground P2 level and finished it on the ground floor.

The spokesman said the investigation was under way and would focus on how the counterweight snapped off. He said the safety features on the lift had worked as they should.

Sofitel refused to comment for this story, while a spokesman for AMP Capital Investors said it was too early to anticipate the outcome of the investigation.

Mr Anesbury, a visitor to the building, said that after his experience in February, passengers reported the plunge to the reception desk at 55 Collins Street, but a spokesman for ANZ Bank said it had no reports of the incident, conceding that communications between the reception desk and the bank may have broken down.

"We'll certainly go back and review our communications processes between the front desk and our maintenance company if there is a suggestion that that could be at fault," he said.

Jane Farrell, the assistant secretary of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union, said there should be closer regulation of lift maintenance.

"There needs to be somebody overseeing the people who claim that they're checking buildings, making them safe, the upkeeping and maintenance, putting new parts in," she said.

"We want to make sure there's a government authority saying 'tick, yes they are doing that.' That is a lot more complicated than me just calling for it, though."

While WorkSafe sets regulations and conducts periodic random checks, responsibility for health and safety rests with the companies. A WorkSafe spokesman said it would be too big a job to monitor all 3500 registered lifts in the state.

"The reality is, nobody will ever get to all of those (lifts). What sort of army would you require to check them? That's why the owners and occupiers have a very clear legal responsibility," he said.

AMP Capital Investors hires an outside business to monitor Kone's maintenance of the lift.

15 June 2006
Dan Oakes, The Age
http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2006/06/14/1149964606778.html?from=top5

Vic: Speed camera operators assaulted at night

MELBOURNE, July 1 AAP - Mobile speed camera will be taken off Victorian roads after 8pm after a number of attacks on camera operators. Victorian Police Minister Tim Holding said speed cameras could reduce night operations, ending at 8pm instead of 11pm.

But police radar guns and fixed speed cameras would operate around the clock, the Herald Sun said.

The state opposition slammed the decision, saying it could lead to more road deaths.

Mr Holding said attacks on camera operators had led to the cutback of hours.

One operator was recently attacked when a brick was hurtled in his car. He suffered cuts, grazes and shock.

"The government condemns utterly any any member of the public who tries to take the law into their own hands by attacking Tenix operators," Mr Holding said.

"They have a very tough job to do. The work that they do in operating speed cameras around the state is part of our road safety strategy."

3 July 2006
CCH Australia Limited
http://www.cch.com.au/fe_news.asp?document_id=78130&topic_code=8

WA: Employee fined over amputation of fingers

An employee of a Jandakot metal fabrication company has been fined $5000 for adversely affecting the health and safety of another person in the workplace after a co-worker had four fingers amputated.

Nathan McQuilkin pleaded guilty and was convicted and fined in the Fremantle Magistrates Court on June 7.

In August 2004, Mr McQuilkin was employed by CC Kenney Pty Ltd as a foreman, and was supervising a 24-year-old second class welder who was using a brake press to bend large sheets of metal to be used in making storage units.

The brake press had not been operating properly the day before, and a service person had removed parts of the guarding system and taken them away to examine, leaving the guard down and telling Mr McQuilkin that the machine should not be operated without those parts.

But Mr McQuilkin permitted the welder to bend some sheets with the brake press, and switched it on, tied the guard into the up position and jammed a piece of wood into the guarding system so the machine would operate without the guard in place.

When the welder put his hands into the machine to remove a piece of metal, the blade descended and stopped in the down position, trapping his right hand.

The button used to raise the blade did not work and nobody else in the factory knew how to raise it, so a representative from the machinery company that had earlier removed parts for examining was called and came to the factory and freed the man's hand.

The welder was taken to hospital, where four fingers on his right hand were amputated, two at the bottom knuckle and two slightly above the bottom knuckle.

WorkSafe WA Commissioner Nina Lyhne said today that the case was yet another graphic example of the importance of guarding on machinery.

"It appears that in this case, the employee actually kept the guarding mechanism out of the way by tying it up so the machine would still operate without the guard in place, which is not only dangerous but illegal," Ms Lyhne said.

"Just as manufacturers are legally required to ensure machinery is designed so operators are protected from injury, so are operators obligated by law to ensure guards are not removed or their operation impeded when the machine is in use.

"Guarding is one of the easiest and most obvious means of minimizing the risk of injury to machinery operators, and it has been required by occupational safety and health legislation for a long time.

"It really is not acceptable to expose workers to the risk of serious injury when we have known how to guard machinery effectively for decades.

"In this case, the employee's actions led to another employee sustaining serious and permanent injuries that would have been avoided if the machine had remained out of use as advised by the service person.

"We need to put a stop to the workplace culture that says working without guards is OK, and make it understood that guards are there for good reason and should not be removed or shifted for the sake of expediency."

Further information on guarding of machinery can be obtained by telephoning WorkSafe on 9327 8777.

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21 June 2006
DOCEP
http://www.docep.wa.gov.au/Corporate/Media/statements/2006/June/Employee_fined_over_.html

NSW: $137,940 fines after apprentice loses arm

A Sydney green waste recycling company and its director have been fined a total of $137,940 by the NSW Industrial Court after a 15 year-old apprentice lost his arm as a result of a workplace incident.
Australian Native Landscapes Pty Ltd, of Terry Hills, and its Managing Director, Mr Patrick Soares, pleaded guilty to breaches of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000.

The conviction resulted from an incident at the company's North Ryde recycling facility on 19 November 2003 when the apprentice was cleaning mulch from a green waste conveyor while it was running.

The apprentice's right arm became caught under the roller, and later had to be amputated.

Justice Schmidt fined Australian Native Landscapes Ltd $125,400 and its Managing Director $12,540.

In handing down the penalties, Justice Schmidt said:
"On the evidence, there can be no doubt at all that what occurred was both entirely foreseeable, and that there were simple steps available which would have ensured that this risk to safety could not have materialised."

Continued page 5.

VIC: P&O Ports Ltd convicted and fined $500,000 after worker's death

A County Court Judge has strongly criticised a major national employer after the death of a worker who fell more than eight metres into the hold of a ship.

County Court Judge Jeanette Morrish today convicted P&O Ports Ltd and fined it a total of $500,000 saying the company's safety failings were at the upper end of the scale, systematic and flagrant.

It's the second-biggest fine ever imposed in Victoria for Occupational Health and Safety matters since the prosecution of Esso over the Longford gas plant explosion.

Forty-five-year-old father of three, Jeff Gray suffered severe head injuries and died at Appleton Dock, Footscray, after he was struck by a 20' container which knocked him into the hold of the MV Kiribati Chief in June 2003.

P&O Ports Ltd pleaded guilty to two charges laid under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985.*

Judge Morrish convicted and fined the company $200,000 on each of the two charges and imposed a further $50,000 fine on each charge because of prior convictions on workplace health and safety matters in Victoria.

WorkSafe's Executive Director, John Merritt, said there could be no excuse for not carrying out basic safety obligations.

"As the judge said this morning. 'A man is dead. There is no point in having procedures if they are not explained and enforced.'

"It is a fundamental requirement of workplace health and safety laws that people are properly trained and supervised, and that they have the equipment to do their job safely.

"This case demonstrates the deadly effects of failing to ensure proper job planning is carried out," Mr Merritt said.

"What we find so frequently is that safety improvements are often only made after a tragedy like this one strikes. As in this case, most risks are already known, but if action is not taken the effects can be disastrous and far-reaching.

"WorkSafe's message is simple. Learn from others' mistakes. Identify risks and fix them."

The court was told a number of serious safety failings were found by WorkSafe Victoria investigators after Mr Gray's death.

- P&O Ports Ltd had written policies and procedures in place that identified the risk of crushing and falling during loading. The procedures were not enforced by the company's management or supervisors.
- There was inadequate instruction of employees to ensure measures to control fall and crushing risks were in place when containers were being loaded.
- Mr Gray was at risk of being crushed as the arrangement of containers on the ship's deck left him standing on a ledge 300-400 mm wide next to the stacked containers.
- There were no safety barriers around the open cargo hold. None of the workers were wearing harnesses to prevent them falling into the ship's hull.
- Elected health and safety representatives had raised concerns about safety issues such as the practice of no guard rails around open hatches and no provision of harnesses on a number of occasions with P&O Ports to no avail.
- No 'tool-box' meeting had been held on the day of the incident to discuss how work was to be performed. WorkSafe found they were rarely, if ever, held.
- P&O Ports Ltd which employs around 3500 people and operates in 28 ports around Australia told the court it pleaded guilty at an early stage, safety improvements were made after the incident, its officers were remorseful and that it had financially helped Mr Gray's family.

* The charges (x2) :
21. Duties of employers

(1) An employer shall provide and maintain so far as is practicable for employees a working environment that is safe and without risks to health.

(2) Without in any way limiting the generality of sub-section (1), an employer

contravenes that sub-section if the employer fails -

(a) to provide and maintain plant and systems of work that are so far as is practicable safe and without risks to health.

Public inquiries: Call the WorkSafe Advisory Service on 1800-136-089 between 8:30am and 5pm Monday to Friday,

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13 June 2006
WorkCover VIC
http://www.workcover.vic.gov.au/vwa/media.nsf/docsbyUNID/60720B2F91326F37CA25718C001CA1D7?Open

NSW: $137,940 fines after apprentice loses arm ...

WorkCover NSW Chief Executive Officer, Jon Blackwell, commented: “This appalling injury to an apprentice at the start of his working life is a tragic lesson that should be borne in mind by all employers and others in the workplace who are responsible for the health and safety of our young workers.”

WorkCover invites employers who may require help with making their workplaces safer to attend a WorkCover workshop or contact WorkCover's Business Assistance Unit for assistance - see WorkCover website or call 13 10 50 for details.

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15 June 2006, NSW WorkCover
http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/MediaResources/MediaReleases/2006/fines_after_apprentice_loses_arm.htm

"Larry here is one of our most reliable men. He's in charge of safety!"

About C-Net

C-Net is an Australian owned company that specialises in SAP based OH&S Solutions. C-Net are the developers and distributors of "SafetyNet for SAP".

"SafetyNet for SAP" was developed for Australian & NZ companies who require an integrated, legislatively compliant and supported OH&S Solution to complement their integrated SAP infrastructure.

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