



# the work health and safety monitor

keeping all with an interest in OHS informed of developments in occupational health and safety nationally and internationally

Issue 4 Vol 17 December 2013



## Occupational Health Society of Australia (WA)

**Two seminars, conducted by the Society, which addressed major current concerns in the occupational health discipline, provided an excellent opportunity for professionals to maintain their professional development at a time when the decline in those activities has become very evident.**



### Long Duration Workers' Compensation Claims

The first of the seminars addressed the increasing incidence and duration of long duration workers' compensation claims and the continuing extended delay in return-to-work.

Workcover WA was represented by Chris White, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Legislation and Scheme Information and Leona Glasby, Manager Research and Evaluation, who provided an extensive overview of the operation of the workers' compensation system and current data on the escalating cost of long duration claims.

Risk Cover, the public sector employees' insurer, was represented by Linda Thompson, who provided details of the increase in incidence and duration of long term claims in that sector.

Craig Stewart, the State Claims Manager for CGU, discussed all aspects of lost duration claims and problems associated with prompt return to work.

Michelle Butler, the President of the Australian Rehabilitation Providers' Association (WA) and Regional Manager of the Recovre Group, addressed the many factors that affect return-to-work and the role of other disciplines engaged in the workers' compensation field.

Dr Dilip Sharma, representing the Royal College of General Practitioners, concluded the seminar with a comprehensive explanation of the difficulties that face General Practitioners which was instructive for participants, many of whom had little understanding of the complexity of the GP's role.

Presentations from the seminar are available online at <http://www.marcsta.com/oh-society>

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## Issue 4

Vol 17  
December 2013



## Merry Christmas from the Management Committee

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# OHS legislative/regulatory matters

## OHS harmonising legislation facing amendment

The Queensland Government has been reviewing recently introduced work health and safety laws and giving businesses an opportunity to provide feedback on those which came into effect last year.

Business representatives have generally supported the laws, but considered some had a significant compliance burden for industry.

This complaint by some employer bodies is not new and has never been justified on economic grounds. It seems that the gains made since the initial introduction of OHS legislation may again be ignored in favour of apathy.

## SA government suspends three building codes

Three Work Health and Safety Codes of Practice have been suspended by the South Australian Minister for Industrial Relations following consultation with the building industry regarding their commercial impact.

Unions have pointed out that Codes of Practice are not mandatory and designed to provide guidance which employers should follow to ensure compliance with duties under legislation or regulation "so far as is reasonably practicable" and they question the lack of understanding demonstrated by the SA Government.

*Source: OHS Safety Net Journal 271, November 2013*

## Continued from page 1

### Psychological Diseases in the Workplace

The second seminar, conducted on 18 November, focused on the increasing prevalence of psychological diseases in the workplace and served a number of useful purposes.

The Interim Chairman of the Society, Joe Maglizza, presented data on the disturbing incidence of mental disorders which are overloading the workers' compensation systems in Australia.

Michael Tunnecliffe, a clinical psychologist with wide experience in the field, discussed what can be done that's helpful and achievable in addressing mental health in the workplace.

Linda Thompson from Risk Cover provided details of the incidence of mental stress claims in the public service, costs incurred and the occupations which are presenting with mental health problems.

Associate Professor Jon Laugharne discussed at length the key issues for best outcomes from the psychiatric point of view.

Presentations from the seminar are available online at <http://www.marcsta.com/oh-society>





## New road trauma support now readily available

Long awaited support for families affected by road trauma has become a reality with the opening of Road Trauma Support (RTSWA) which will offer information, peer support and specialised bereavement counselling for families living with the consequences of a road crash, as well as preventative education.

This free service will be widely available to those involved and/or injured, the bereaved – their families, carers and friends, those who may have caused a trauma, witnesses, first responders and emergency service personnel.

For full information or care following a road crash, visit [www.rtswa.org.au](http://www.rtswa.org.au)

Picture above: ICCWA CEO Deb Costello, bereaved parents Alan and Glenda Maloney, Acting Minister of Road Safety John Day and RTSWA Manager Jenny Duggan at the official launch of Road Trauma Support WA. Picture below: Lighting a candle of remembrance of WA road fatalities



## Global standard for occupational health and safety

In August the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) approved the creation of a new project committee to develop an international standard for occupational health and safety management systems (to be known as ISO 45001), built upon OHSAS 18001 – the internationally recognised and adopted British Standard for Occupational Health and Safety.

The standard is intended to provide governmental agencies, industry and others with effective, usable guidance for improving worker safety around the world.

The Secretariat was assigned to the British Standards Institution and its first meeting was held in London in October 2013 where agreement was reached on the upcoming publication to the Working Group of the first Working Draft of the new ISO 45001 on Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems Requirements.

Source: Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

## Australia-wide fatalities as at November 2013

As at 20 November 2013, 149 Australian workers have been killed while at work. Of these, 35 occurred in transport, postal and warehouse industries; 40 in agriculture, forestry and fishing; 17 in construction, 3 in manufacturing and nine in arts and recreation services.

Source: OHS Safety Net Journal 271, November 2013



## Safe Work Australia – latest report on health and safety in the road freight industry

A new report by Safe Work Australia has reported the following findings:

- There has been a 48% decrease in the annual number of fatalities over the last four years. This is cold comfort, however, as the fatality rates were approximately 10 times higher than for all industries across the eight years up to 2011;
- Seventy-eight per cent (78%) of the work-related fatalities were the result of single-vehicle incidents on public roads;
- Each year between 2002 and 2011 there were around 4,000 non-fatal serious workers' compensation claims;
- Importantly, the majority of workers' compensation claims were for manual handling or falls rather than vehicle related incidents.

Source: [SafetySolutions.net.au](http://SafetySolutions.net.au)



## US mining fatality research reveals shift work higher fatality risk

A recent analysis of surveillance data collected by the US Mine Safety and Health Administration on 157,410 employees and contractors who worked at underground or surface mines between 1998 -2007 has revealed that the likelihood of an incident resulting in a death, instead of an injury or near-miss, increased after eight hours in shifts beginning at 11:00 pm.

The researchers said that, based on their findings, possible interventions may include work-hour restrictions, particularly for those working night shift.

Source: *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, November 2013

## AIR QUALITY

## Motor vehicle emissions promote clogged arteries

Academic researchers have found that breathing motor vehicle emissions triggers a change in the high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, altering its cardio-vascular protective qualities so that it actually contributes to clogged arteries.

This is the first study showing that air pollutants promote the development of dysfunctional, pro-oxidative HDL cholesterol and the activation of an internal oxidation pathway. This may be one of the mechanisms in how air pollution can exacerbate clogged arteries that lead to heart disease and stroke, said senior author Dr Jesus Araujo, an associate professor at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

Source: *SafetySolutions.net.au*

## WHO confirms air pollution causes cancer

The World Health Organization has classified smoke and fumes from power generation, agricultural and transport as 'carcinogenic'.

The most recent figures indicate that nearly a quarter of a million lung cancer deaths in 2010 were caused by air pollution. Bladder cancer has also now been linked to poor air quality.

The developing powerhouses such as China and India are the worst affected – 40 per cent of the deaths blamed on air pollution were in China.

**Dr Jim Marcos from the Australian Lung Foundation says that there is just no amount of safe exposure to air pollution.**

Much of the danger lies in the pollution we can't even see. Nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide and ozone – all are invisible and odourless.

Source: *ABC.net.au*

## Clean up or park

The Californian Air Resources Board and the Highway Patrol have acted to enforce the tough anti-air pollution laws in that State by giving heavy polluters in the trucking industry notice to clean up exhaust emissions or park their trucks.

Law makers have enacted a series of anti-pollution laws, one of them ruling that big rigs and heavy trucks can only deposit so much diesel soot in the air.

Diesel manufacturers have responded with cleaner-burning engines, relying on a device known as a soot filter, which takes much of the worst offenders out of diesel emissions.

The problem is that the segment of workers least able to afford the new, less-polluting equipment are not able to comply.

With the World Health Organization, however, labelling diesel fumes more directly responsible than second-hand cigarette smoke as a cause of cancer, local and state governments believe that they have a responsibility to maintain their enforcement actions.

In Washington DC the Transit Authority will add 654 new transit buses to its fleet which will emit 80 per cent less particulate matter than previous vehicles. The General Manager and CEO said that the new vehicles will advance their commitment to reducing emissions and improving fuel economy for years to come.

One can only question why we in Australia have not reacted similarly to the IARC and WHO rulings.

Source: *R Wheeler, IEHC*

## Diesel emissions in NSW mines

The NSW Department of Trade and Investment has initiated two industry technical reference groups to assist in managing health and safety risks from diesel fumes in underground mines; one for coal and one for metal mines with the following proposed scope:

- identifying areas of risk and developing generic diesel emissions control plans;
- means to provide fit-for-purpose diesel equipment to minimise emission generation;
- ventilation systems to assist in the control of airborne diesel emissions;
- personnel exposure monitoring.

The core activities of the group will be to:

- participate in the review of legislation and codes of practice on diesel emissions;
- participate in the review of the Guidelines for the Management of Diesel Engine Pollution (MDG29);
- monitor industry performance in minimising exposures;
- assist in the development of guidance and assessment material relevant to the scope;
- effectively communicate its activities to industry;
- advise health and safety committees as required;
- provide a means for industry consultation on issues as they arise.

The initiative is an outcome of workshops held earlier in 2013 which followed the declaration of the International Agency for Research on Cancer that classified whole diesel exhaust as a carcinogen to humans.

Source: *NSW Mine Safety News*

## New helmet to eliminate risk of carbon monoxide poisoning

Research conducted by Virginia Tech investigators into a wearable computing system installed in a helmet to protect construction workers from carbon monoxide poisoning has been awarded recognition from a prestigious scientific and engineering community.

Carbon monoxide poisoning is a significant problem for construction workers in both residential and industrial settings.

The researchers used a prototype for monitoring the blood oxygen saturation. They selected a helmet for the installation of a wearable computer because they needed a design that could be worn year round, which ruled out seasonal clothing such as overalls or coats. They also wanted a design that was socially acceptable, and one that struck a balance between comfort, usability and feasibility.

Researchers said that 'this helmet is only a first step toward our long-term vision of having a network of wearable and environmental sensors and intelligent personal protective gear on construction sites that will improve safety for workers'.

Source: *Safety Solutions.net.au*

Picture: Jason B. Forsyth, right, of Durham, N.C., a Ph.D. candidate in computer engineering, places a wearable computing system on a helmet to protect construction workers from carbon monoxide poisoning. The work garnered the Virginia Tech researchers a "Best Paper" award.



# HEALTH

## New guidance on dealing with minor contamination of asbestos-containing dust

Safe Work Australia has issued a *Fact Sheet* that provides guidance on what is meant by a minor contamination of asbestos-containing dust or debris (ACD) which it says should be read together with the relevant Code of Practice dealing with asbestos.

The *Fact Sheet* explains what asbestos-contaminated dust or debris is and what is meant by a 'minor contamination'. Examples are provided to illustrate this information and a step-by-step guide included on how to organise a clean-up of a 'minor contamination'.

Source: <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/SWA/about/Publications/Documents/778/Minor-contamination-asbestos-factsheet.pdf>

## National asbestos register established

Australia was the most prolific user of asbestos containing material in the world with an estimated one in three homes built in Australia between 1946-1987 containing asbestos.

This resulted in Australia having the highest reported per capita incidence of asbestos-related diseases in the world.

The National Register, established in June captures the details of members of the community who think that they may have been exposed to asbestos containing materials. Its purpose is to have a record of potential exposure in case an individual develops an asbestos related disease in the future.

Source: Media Release June 2013, Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

## US companies that focus on health and safety shown to be more profitable

A new study carried out by HealthNEXT LLC which tracked the stock market performance of companies which had received corporate health achievement awards, showed that recipients had outperformed the Standard and Poor 500.

The study authors said that 'engaging in a comprehensive effort to promote wellness, reduce the health risks of a workforce and mitigate the complications of chronic illness within these populations can produce remarkable impacts on health care costs, productivity and performance.'

Researchers concluded that the study adds new evidence-based data to a growing body of literature indicating that 'healthy workforces provide a competitive financial advantage in the marketplace'.

Source: EHS Today September 2013

## Occupational cancer the leading cause of work-related deaths in Canada

According to a study published in August 2013 by the Occupational Cancer Research Centre in Canada, occupational cancer is now the leading cause of compensated work-related deaths in Canada, exceeding those from traumatic injuries and disorders.

Compensation for occupational cancer deaths in Canada has been on the rise in recent years, particularly in Ontario, where there are now more than two occupational cancer deaths for each traumatic injury death.

Nationwide, the high risk injuries were manufacturing, construction, mining and, more recently, government services (believed to be the result of an increase in the number of claims accepted for firefighters in Ontario).

Source: Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

## Facts about diabetes in Australia

A report prepared by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released in July presents information on expenditure for diabetes in Australia in 2008/09. It also provides information on how this expenditure has changed in the last decade and how it is expected to grow in the future.

Here are some key facts about diabetes in Australia:

- 4% of Australians have diabetes (898,000 people)
- 222,544 people began using insulin to treat their diabetes between 2000-2009
- One in 20 pregnancies is affected by diabetes
- In the indigenous population the proportion of people with diabetes is three to one compared to the non-indigenous
- Over half of adults are overweight or obese putting them at greater risk for diabetes
- Three in five people with diabetes also have cardiovascular disease
- 7.2 million pharmaceutical scripts for diabetes medicines were claimed in 2011
- Almost two per cent of all health expenditure was spent treating diabetes in 2004/05.

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare July 2013



# PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH



## Does work-related stress explain differences in psychological health and productivity?

New research conducted at the University of South Australia has shown not only a link between workers' health and life expectancy, but also a correlation between improved health in the workplace and better national productivity.

Professor Maureen Dollard from the University of South Australia says that the research shows that national ideology, policy and the power of groups, such as unions, in supporting workplace psychological safety climate are important in promoting better psychological health and, ultimately, better all-round health. There is a proven link between stress and poor health outcomes.

Source: *SafetySolutions.net.au*

## Facts regarding psychological diseases in Australia

*Mental health services in Australia- in brief 2013*, a report released on world mental health day by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, reports the following facts:

- Stress-related diseases will be the leading causes of global disease problems by 2020.
- One in every eight GP encounters were mental health related in 2011/12.
- The most commonly managed mental health problem was depression (34 per cent).
- There were 7.9 million subsidised services provided by health professionals in 2011/12.
- There were 23 million mental health related prescriptions subsidised in 2011/12.
- One in five Australians between 16-85 years (7.3 million) experience symptoms of mental disorder each year.

Source: *AIHW, September 2013*

## Making sense of stress and its effect on your health

Determining how much chronic stress impacts on your health is challenging, because every one of us responds differently to potentially stressful situations.

Dr Mary-Frances O'Connor, a psychologist and stress researcher at the University of Arizona, says that 'stress is when the demands of your environment exceed the coping resources that you believe that you have, so in all cases, there's perception – perception of what the environment demands and perception of your own ability to cope with it.'

Source: *ABC net, September 2013*

## Anxiety linked to a need for more personal space

British researchers have found that people with anxiety perceive threats as closer compared with those who are not anxious. They say that their findings could be used to link defensive behaviour to levels of anxiety, particularly among those with risky jobs such as firefighters and police officers.

The study revealed that those who scored higher on an anxiety test reacted more dramatically to stimuli about 8 inches from their face compared with those who had low anxiety scores.

Anxious people viewed threats as closer than those who were not anxious – even if the perceived threats actually were the same distance away. Although the brain does not trigger defensive reactions, the study authors said it could control their intensity.

This finding is the first objective measure of the size of the area surrounding the face that each individual considers at high risk, and thus wants to protect through the most effective defensive motor responses.

Source: *MedicineNet August 2013*



## Stress reduction programs not being implemented effectively

Work-related factors play a significant role in employees' stress levels and a growing number of employers are taking steps to help employees reduce their stress. However, most programs are not being utilised to their full advantage according to a study by the firm Aon Hewitt.

Kathleen Mahieu, leader of behavioural health consulting, said that "employees are increasingly feeling stressed by work-related pressures and this can often be destructive to health productivity and performance. Unfortunately, most stress management programs in the workplace today aren't being implemented in a way that's effective."

Recent industry research shows that highly stressed people are 30 per cent less likely to eat healthily, 25 per cent less likely to exercise and 200 per cent more likely to fail weight loss programs.

**Importantly, these employees also get one-half as much sleep as people reporting low levels of stress.**

Source: Cos-mag, August 2013

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## Adverse working conditions for working-age adults are associated with the risk of depression

The findings of a study by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, published in the September Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, have added to a growing body of evidence that employment is an important source of divergence in mental health across mid-life.

Using an approach called item response theory, the researchers analysed the relationship between working conditions and depressive symptoms in a nationally representative sample of working-age adults. The study included four waves of data collection over 15 years in nearly 1,900 respondents.

The results showed that workers with a higher total 'negative working conditions score' also had higher scores for depression.

The study helps to clarify the net effects of working conditions on depression in the working population – a very common and costly problem for employers and the US economy at large.

Source: ISHN September 2013



## Gloomy outlook may be genetic

Researchers have found that a specific gene variant can cause people to perceive emotional events – especially negative ones – more vividly than others.

The study, reported in the journal, *Psychological Science*, showed that volunteers, shown positive, negative and neutral words in rapid succession, were more likely to identify negative words than others if they had the gene variant ADRA2b.

Professor Rebecca Todd from the University of Columbia said that the findings suggest people experience emotional aspects of the world partly through gene-coloured glasses and that biological variation at the genetic level can play a significant role in individual differences in perception.

The researchers said that the results offer new insight into how genetics – combined with other factors such as education, culture and mood – can affect how people see the world around them.

*Source: MedicineNet October 2013*



## Genetic overlap seen in five mental disorders

Most psychiatric disorders are moderately to highly heritable. The degree to which genetic variation is unique to individual disorders or shared across disorders is unclear.

In a study supported by the US National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and published in the August edition of the journal, *Nature Genetics*, five mental disorders were found to share common inherited genetic variations.

The investigators analysed the genomes of several thousand people with the five mental disorders and people without the disorders.

Overall, common genetic variations accounted for 17 per cent to 28 per cent of risk for the following five disorders:

- schizophrenia
- bipolar disorder
- depression
- attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder
- autism

The overlap is highest between schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder, moderate between bi-polar disorder and depression and between attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and depression, and lowest between schizophrenia and autism.

The genetic overlap between schizophrenia and depression could prove important in terms of research and diagnosing patients according to the study's authors.

Bruce Cuthbert, director of NIMH's adult research and treatment development division, said that 'such evidence quantifying shared genetic risk factors among traditional psychiatric diagnoses will help us to move towards classification that will be more faithful to nature.'

*Source: MedicineNet*



# HEALTH - SUBSTANCE ABUSE

## Students abusing prescribed drugs

Figures published in Britain now show that soaring numbers of students are abusing prescribed drugs to boost concentration to keep revising for hours on end.

The Annual Report of the Care Quality Commission says prescriptions for methyl-phenidate drugs, including Ritalin, which are used to treat Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, have risen by 56 per cent in the past five years.

In 2012, GPs in England wrote 657,000 prescriptions for such drugs compared to 420,000 in 2007.

These figures do not include the rocketing number of students who are ordering other prescription-only 'smart drugs' in bulk from the internet.

*Source: The British Psychological Society, August 2013*

## Mental and substance disorders – the leading cause of non-fatal health issues around the world

According to new findings from the Global Burden of Disease Study, mental and substance abuse disorders are responsible for more of the global burden of deaths and illnesses than HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis or diabetes.

A separate study has revealed that of 78,000 drug disorder deaths in 2010, 55 per cent were believed to be the result of opioid dependence.

Study leader, Harvey Whiteford of the Queensland Centre for Medical Health Research at the University of Queensland said that 'in all countries, stigma about mental and substance abuse disorders constrain the use of available resources as do inefficiencies in the distribution of findings and interventions. Mental health policy and services research will need to identify more effective ways to provide sustainable mental health services, especially in resource-constrained environments.'

*Source: MedicineNet, August 2013*

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## Does long-term marijuana use reduce people's motivation levels

**According to a small brain-scan study, long term marijuana use may indeed reduce people's motivation levels.**

**Researchers at Imperial College, London, used PET brain imaging to assess dopamine production in the brains of 19 regular marijuana users and 19 non-users. Dopamine is a chemical linked to motivation.**

**The brain scans showed the regular marijuana users tended to produce less dopamine.**

**The findings, published recently in the Journal Biological Psychiatry, tie in with previous research on addiction, which has found that substance abusers – for example, people who are dependent on cocaine or amphetamines -have altered dopamine systems.**

**The lowest dopamine levels were seen in people who met diagnostic criteria for marijuana abuse or dependence. This suggests that measuring dopamine levels could provide a marker of a serious level or addiction to marijuana, the study authors said.**

*Source: MedicineNet, July 2013*

# TRAINING

## Ontario introducing mandatory OHS awareness training

The Ontario Ministry of Labour has introduced a regulation requiring employers to ensure that all workers and supervisors have completed a basic occupational health and safety awareness program.

Developed in partnership with labour groups, businesses and municipalities, the training will be mandatory for all workers and supervisors in the province who are covered by the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

The requirement becomes mandatory on 1 July 2014.

Source: *Cos-mag*, November 2013

## Safe Work Australia sponsors new chapters in the body of knowledge for generalist OHS professionals

Four new chapters for inclusion in the 2012 OHS Body of Knowledge will be developed through the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board which will add to the education and professional practice of work health and safety professionals.

The chapters will cover the topics of work health and safety jurisprudence, organisational culture, risk and decision making and user-centred and safe design.

Input into chapter structure and content will be sought through topic-specific technical panels and professional workshops.

Employers and recruiters are able to use the OHS Body of Knowledge as a guide for selecting qualified work health and safety professionals.

Source: *SafetySolutions.net.au*

# SLEEP/FATIGUE

## Night light colour can affect your mood

A study of hamsters has shown that exposure to blue or white light at night produced more depressive-like symptoms and depression-like changes in the brain than those that were exposed to red light.

Co-author Randy Nelson, a professor of neuroscience and psychology at Ohio State University, says that although results obtained from animal studies are not always replicated in humans, the results may prove important for people, particularly those whose work on the night shift makes them susceptible to mood disorders. He added that if we could use red light when appropriate for night-shift workers, it may not have some of the negative effects on their health that white light does.

Study co-author Tracy Bedrosian suggested that if you need a night light in the bathroom or bedroom it might be better to have one that gives off a red light.

Source: *MedicineNet* August 2013



# Workers' Compensation

## Sedentary work – the new workers' compensation time bomb

Physiotherapist and creator of the "Happy Body at Work" education package, Anna-Louise Bouvier, says that employers are only seeing the 'tip of the iceberg' of workers' compensation claims for body and mental stress from sedentary work.

Addressing the 'low-level' side effects of sedentary work – which includes headaches, back and neck pain and poor sleep – will reduce an employer's absenteeism and presenteeism rates as well as the likelihood of employees claiming workers' compensation for body and mental stress injuries down the track, she says.

Two ways employers can reduce sedentary work risks are by changing the work environment or educating workers – or both if the budget permits.

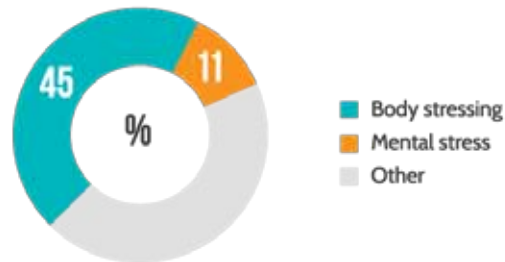
Source: OHS Alert July 2013

Source: <https://happybodyatwork.com.au/benefits>

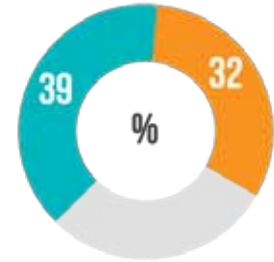
**Direct cost for Australian employers\***  
**\$10.1 Bn** annually for stress related presenteeism & absenteeism

**Time lost each year\***  
**3.2 DAYS** per worker due to workplace stress

**Total Accepted Claims\*\***



**Total Claim Costs\*\***



**Avg total cost\*\***  
**\$76,000** Per claim for body stress related incidents

**Avg total cost per claim\*\***  
**\$251,000** for mental stress related incidents

\* Medibank Private 2008 The Cost of Workplace Stress \*\* Compendium of WHS and Workers' Compensation Statistics December 2012 (p20)

## Western Australian career firefighters gain cancer entitlement

Workers' compensation legislation has been amended to enable career firefighters to claim compensation for a number of specified cancers.

Various scientific studies have indicated an increased risk to career firefighters of contracting certain cancers from their accumulated exposure to carcinogens in the course of fighting structural and chemical fires.

The law requires that a worker's employment must be a significant contributing factor to the contraction of a disease in order to claim workers' compensation entitlements.

It will still be open to the employer or insurer to rebut the presumption if it can be proven that the firefighter contracted the cancer in any other way.

Source: Work Cover WA Corporate Communications, November 2013





# AROUND THE GLOBE

## EUROPE

### Global asbestos trade increases

Despite the knowledge, accepted by health experts internationally, of the deadly effects of asbestos, the co-ordinator of the Alliance of Environmental, Labour and Health Organisations around the world, Kathleen Ruff, has reported that global asbestos exports increased in 2012 by more than 20 per cent.

Russia, the biggest exporter by far, exports almost one million tons largely to developing countries.

*Source: Prevent Cancer Now, Canada, July 2013*

### Depression now world's second leading cause of disability

Findings from the latest Global Burden of Disease study (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, USA) highlight the importance of including depressive disorders as a global health priority, researchers say.

The study provides the most recent and comprehensive estimates of the degree to which death and disability are attributable to depressive disorders, both worldwide and in individual countries and regions.

The 1990 study ranked depression as the fourth leading cause of disease burden.

The 2000 study ranked depression as the third leading cause of disease burden.

The 2010 study now ranks depressive disorders second in terms of global disability burden.

*Source: Medscape, November 2013*

## USA

### Mesothelioma and other cancers higher among firefighters

A new study involving 30,000 firefighters from three large cities in the US, has found that they had higher rates of several types of cancers, and all of the cancers combined, than the US population as a whole.

The findings by NIOSH researchers and colleagues were reported in the peer reviewed journal, Occupational and Environmental Medicine, in October.

Cancers of the respiratory, digestive and urinary systems mostly accounted for the higher rates of cancer in the study population. It was the first study to identify an excess of mesothelioma in US firefighters.

The study analysed cancers and cancer deaths through to 2009 among 29,993 firefighters employed since 1950.

*Source: OHS Online, October 2013*

## GERMANY

### German women have higher work-related disorders

An initial analysis of a 2012 survey in Germany of more than 20,000 workers has revealed that women more often suffer a wide range of work-related complaints than men.

They report a higher incidence of musculoskeletal disorders, vision problems, dizziness, headache, fatigue, emotional stress, sleep disorders, physical and psychological exhaustion as well as coughs, skin and eye irritation and cardiac disorders.

The survey was conducted by the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

*Source: European Trade Union Institute, Oct 2013*

## JAPAN

### Japanese clerical workers at risk of depression

A report published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine has found the Japanese clerical employees who worked long hours (at least 60 hours per week) and had high job demands were at a higher risk of depression.

The risk seemed to increase over time.

Previous studies have reported mixed results regarding the physical and mental health effects of long hours. The new study highlights the importance of high job demands and feeling overworked – combined with long hours – as a risk factor for depression in employees.

*Source: COS Mag, August 2013*

## FRANCE

### Preventing psychological risks in the French public service

The French Government, trade unions and public employers have signed a framework agreement on the prevention of psychosocial risks in the public service.

The agreement requires each public employer to draw up a psychological risk assessment and prevention plan by 2015.

Around five million civil servants will be affected.

Other undertakings include better resourcing of health and safety committees including time off for union officials and preventive health services.

*Source: European Trade Union Inst, Oct 2013*



## Occupational Health Society of Australia (WA Branch)

Incorporated in 1978, the Occupational Health Society of Australia (WA Branch) is a non-profit association.

The Society had been inactive for some years and in June 2013 was re-activated to provide a forum for the wide range of disciplines engaged in the occupational health profession in Western Australia.

The aims of the Society are:

- to develop effective occupational health practice within Western Australia;
- to encourage awareness by individuals, organisations and other bodies, of the role of occupational health;
- to provide a forum for professional contact between persons interested in, and working in, occupational health;
- to express an independent, professional viewpoint on all aspects of occupational health considered desirable in the public interest;
- to seek the improvement or an extension of the existing legislation for the promotion of safety and health at work in order to ensure uniform principles are applied in all occupational activities.

Visit [www.ohswa.marcsta.com](http://www.ohswa.marcsta.com) for more information.

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W      MARCSTA Work Health and Safety Induction  
C      denotes the Work Safely in the Construction Industry program.  
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