

Health and Safety, after Pike River

The Engineering, Printing & Manufacturing Union said it will redouble its efforts in 2011 to provide workers with a stronger, more effective voice in workplace health and safety, in the aftermath of last year's Pike River mine disaster and Gulf of Mexico oil rig explosion.

"If there is one thing the union represents above all it is democracy in the workplace - the right to have a say over the things at work that affect us," said Andrew Little, national secretary of the EPMU, the Pike River miners' union, just prior to Christmas.

"And if the Pike River tragedy and all workplace accidents tell us anything it is that there is no such thing as too little to say on health and safety - it is number one."

"Too often businesses say 'increase productivity and make more profit', but we should never tolerate more profit if it comes at the expense of a safe and healthy workplace."

Meanwhile CTU Health and Safety Officer Tina McIvor, in a feature article in the January-February issue of Safeguard magazine, has cautioned against a change in direction in health and safety policy.

She noted a comment in the September 2010 issue of the magazine, which suggested more self-regulation could be a potential future issue in the health and safety arena, and that "risk" could feature more strongly in legislation.

But McIvor said that whereas 'risk' related to business risks to an organisation, the term 'hazard' related to safety risks to people.

"From the risk management (rather than safety management) perspective, a possible logical result from a calculation of risk - which is exposure, probability and the consequence - is that an organisation could take risks that may cost a worker's life or sustain injury or illness, but save the organisation millions of dollars," she said.

"In the interests of ensuring the safety and health of New Zealand workers I would argue strongly against this policy direction."

"New Zealand doesn't need to learn any more of the hard lessons associated with business priorities taking precedence over basic worker safety standards. We have to remember that our priority must be the safety of our workers," Tina McIvor said.

EPMU's Andrew Little called for better recognition that some workplaces and industries are inherently dangerous and workers in them are entitled to the best possible protections.

"The Government simply must increase health and safety monitoring and enforcement across the board, but especially in the most dangerous sectors such as mining and offshore oil and gas," he said.



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unions talking health and safety

CTU Update

Our sympathy and support go out to the people of Canterbury. A natural disaster like the Christchurch Earthquake is an extraordinary and devastating event.

Workers Memorial Day commemorations on April 28 will be particularly moving.

Along with loss of life, injuries and all of the direct challenges faced by people in Christchurch, the relationship between workers and employers will be disrupted.

The Council of Trade Unions (CTU) has a dedicated website with advice for Christchurch workers, and have a coordinator supporting local unions, through Unions Canterbury, on the ground in Christchurch.

Also remember that the obligations under the Health & Safety in Employment Act are self explanatory and continue to apply.

An employer must provide a safe and healthy workplace and must take all practicable steps to ensure workers health and safety.

And all employees must take all practicable steps to ensure their own and others health and safety.

If any worker has any concerns about safety they are entitled to refuse to work.

For more information, refer to our website, or speak to your delegate or union office.

The CTU's special Earthquake website is:

www.union.org.nz/earthquake

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ABOUT

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