The Workplace Exposure Standards Framework under the model work health and safety laws

Submissions of

THE AUSTRALIAN WORKERS' UNION

19 SEPTEMBER 2018

About the Australian Workers' Union

The Australian Workers' Union ('**AWU**') is the nation's oldest union, and also one of the largest. The AWU has wide coverage in many high-risk industries, such as oil and gas, civil construction, aviation, firefighting, mining and agriculture. Workers in these industries are routinely exposed to dangerous chemicals and particles as part of their employment.

Unfortunately, the AWU has intimate experience with work-related deaths, from the exposure to dangerous chemicals and particles. The AWU is also experienced in corporations attempting to shift the blame to workers, and the inadequate penalties that are imposed against these corporations when they are found to be responsible.

AWU submission

The AWU has had the opportunity to review the submission provided by the Australian Council of Trade Unions ('ACTU'). The AWU supports this submission and our submission should be read in conjunction with the ACTU's submission. The AWU also wishes to make the following additional observations.

1. That Workplace Exposure Standards (WES) **must** be mandatory to ensure workplace safety.
2. Advisory WES make the cost justification for compliance to exposure more challenging for businesses internally. This reduces the likelihood they will be implemented.
3. That advisory standards make it harder for all PCBUs, including those that are small-medium sized, to know they are complying.
4. The AWU supports implementation of a streamlined methodology to update the WES values.
5. The AWU supports a two-yearly interim review and five-yearly comprehensive review, Compared with the status quo, where one workplace exposure standard is updated per review.
6. Option 2 is expected to bring several broad benefits to workplaces and workers across Australia, such as:

    1. Reducing the burden of injury, illness and disease on workers and their families.
    2. Improving productivity.
    3. Lifting confidence in the safety of workplace.
    4. Reducing total hospitalisations and associated costs for workplace incidents.
    5. Reducing workers' compensation claims.

Employers are routinely exposing workers to hazardous substances that are above and outside the WES. Every day workers continue to be diagnosed with illnesses relating to exposure to hazardous substances at work. AWU members strongly believe these laws need to be strengthened and the penalties for breaches increased to reduce the risk of injury for workers as well a minimising the consequences on their families and the workplaces that follow.

If you have any questions regarding this submission please contact the AWU National Organiser [redacted] or by phone on [redacted]

Yours Sincerely

[redacted]

Michael Denton
Chairman
Oil & Gas Industry Reference Group
Australian Workers Union