



Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee

Hearing Date: 20 November 2023

Question[s] taken on notice

Directed to: Australian Institute of Health and Safety, Andy Heinrichs

Received Date: 13 December 2023

1. **Wendy LOVELL, page 34-5**

Question Asked:

I am just wondering if you can give us any specific examples of where you feel that excessive risk was taken in the professional, volunteer or spontaneous workforce during the floods?

Response:

During the development of our submission none of the contributors volunteered information regarding specific instances of excessive risk taken by professional, volunteer or spontaneous workers. Our submission was made based on general observations by Victorian-based occupational health and safety practitioners and professionals.

2. **Sheena WATT, page 35**

Question Asked:

I did read in the submission where there was a suggestion about Queensland providing an example of the development of effective resources for stakeholders in respect of OH&S risks. Let me just say as somebody who previously worked in WorkCover Queensland I am very happy to see those good works and good deeds getting recognised down here. Are there any other insights from what you saw happen up in Queensland that you thought would be worth the committee knowing about?

Response:

Below lists examples of WorkSafe Queensland/Office of Industrial Relations resources:

- <https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/news-and-events/newsletters/esafe-newsletters/esafe-editions/esafe-rural/may-2019/floods-highlight-leptospirosis-risk> (May 2019)

- <https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/safety-and-prevention/hazards/workplace-hazards/dangers-in-your-workplace/storms-and-floods> (updated Oct 2021)
- <https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/news-and-events/newsletters/esafe-newsletters/esafe-editions/esafe-rural/january-2019/clean-up-safely-during-storm-and-flood-season> (updated Jan 2019)
- https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/19235/qld-floods-managing-fatigue.pdf (2011)
- https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/17419/flood-safety-fact-sheet.pdf (2017)

The dates of these materials indicate these sorts of communications have existed for some time. In contrast, our members weren't aware of any existing similar communications/information from WorkSafe Victoria either immediately prior or subsequent to the October 2022 flood events. We note that today, the WorkSafe Victoria website has information here: <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/floods-and-other-natural-disasters>. However 1) we cannot verify when this information was created, and 2) our contributors weren't aware of these resources being promoted at the time.

Our view is that these resources from Queensland are well developed, concise, and likely to provide valuable assistance for duty holders and other stakeholders before and after flood events.

With significant flooding and other natural disasters likely to occur more frequently, we're calling on WorkSafe Victoria to 1) be more proactive in their communications ahead of these events, and 2) find the right balance regarding including these communications into their overall communications strategy. We encourage WorkSafe Victoria to leverage the latest research on preventions, mitigations, and risk communications for all demographics, rather than simply copying the Queensland-based resources.

We also call on WorkSafe Victoria and other stakeholders/representatives of the State to coordinate the provision of risk identification and controls education and training to key stakeholders, to aid in preparing for and responding to natural disasters. As per the model below from the National Training Laboratories (an international not-for-profit driving behavioural science advancements, see <https://www.ntl.org/about-us/vision/>), communication is just one piece of the puzzle to affect positive change.



Source: National Training Laboratories, Bethel, Maine

3. **The DEPUTY CHAIR, page 37**

Question Asked:

Are there particular areas in terms of particular agencies or particular cohorts where the institute has identified significant shortfalls in training and awareness?

Andrew HEINRICHS: No, we have not done that gap analysis to specifically identify shortfalls across any organisation or sector. Our submission is based on not just how these floods specifically – I do not know if this impacts in terms of being outside the terms of reference – were dealt with but also what is to come.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: It is outside our terms of reference, but I think we are all cognisant that we are entering an El Niño, and, yes, there will be many of the same questions. You referenced some stats, potentially from the ABS. ...Could I ask you to take that on notice in terms of providing the committee with that subsequently?

Response:

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) dataset/survey I was referring to can be found here:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/work-related-injuries/latest-release>

This is a work-related injury survey that has been run five times since 2005-06, i.e. every four years. It was last run in 2021-22. We think increasing the frequency of this survey to annually would provide policy-makers, industry, government, and other stakeholders with greater visibility as to the extent and nature of workplace harm occurring around the country, and allow for more granular trend analysis. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the ABS to have input into the development of this and any other work-related injury surveys.

Regarding harm from natural disasters/flood events specifically, more event- and context-specific surveys would need to be developed. These would need to be very targeted and more detailed in their design. There also may be implementation challenges post significant disaster, as those impacted may be unlikely or unable to complete a survey as they deal with the consequences of the event.

Of greater value would be more **proactive** surveys that measure communities' and employers' awareness of and preparation for natural disasters. E.g. are they aware of supporting information and resources from WorkSafe Victoria and other agencies. We call these datasets 'leading indicators', as opposed to injury data which are 'lagging indicators'. Leading indicators are much more valuable in that they help those overseeing the system doing the measuring, either at the organisation or population level, identify insights into preventing injuries, diseases and fatalities. There are many opportunities here, such as partnering with the tertiary sector to design and implement more proactive capability-building initiatives. We welcome any opportunity to provide input into any survey initiatives, to help policy-makers better understand the extend of harm caused by these events, and the state of preparedness to deal with future disasters.