

# WORKCOVER NSW SAFEWORK AWARDS

SPECIAL REPORT

## Waking up to the problem

New laws will offer greater protection against fatigue-related injury, writes **Melinda Ham**.

If you work for more than 17 hours straight, research shows your fatigue and level of impairment is equal to a blood-alcohol concentration of more than 0.05 – or being drunk on the job due to a lack of sleep.

Although it's illegal to drive a car this impaired, construction, oil, gas and mining companies, as well as public institutions such as hospitals, still allow workers to administer drugs and carry out other medical procedures, operate heavy machinery or drive cranes in this sleep-deprived state. But the situation is poised for change.

Delivering a paper on the topic at the Safety Institute of Australia's Safety Conference this week, a

responsible positions, such as managers, face payments up to \$600,000 or up to five years in jail.

"The big problem is that a lot of workers don't even know their rights," Chan says. "From next year, it's not just direct employees but independent contractors and contractors who work from home who will be covered by this legislation."

And what about a company's possible argument that a worker should have known better because they were trained in safety procedures? It's simply no defence, Chan says.

"Workers take short cuts when they are really tired," she says, adding that they may ignore safety signage in the same way a person under the influence of alcohol could.

Chan stumbled unexpectedly on the link between safety and fatigue while researching for her PhD. During time at four large-scale construction sites in China, beginning in 2006, she asked executives, safety managers and workers to rate safety risks on a list of 290. Nearly eight out of 10 chose fatigue as their first choice.

So what can companies do? Chan says it's about increased vigilance. The ideal situation is for companies to limit the maximum number of hours permitted on a shift – for example, truckers already have a 12-hour limit per shift and a stipulated number of breaks at regular intervals.

Alternatively, if a company requires employees to work longer hours to meet deadlines or cover staffing shortfalls, under the new legislation requiring it to show "due diligence", it will have to create a system to deal with the resulting fatigue and its potential repercussions.

"Companies already have to provide toilets, drinks and other items for workers' welfare. For fatigue, they will have to provide a bed where staff can take a nap if they can't travel home, or other ways they can de-stress, such as a shower or television room."

### BEST WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY PRACTICES IN A SMALL BUSINESS



Visionary ... Production Automotive chief Melinda Leyshon is not prepared to compromise on safety; (below) a sign reminds workers of the importance of prevention.

## Driven to find the perfect fix

Winner: **Production Automotive**

WHEN Production Automotive opened for business in Penrith, managing director Melinda Leyshon wanted to ensure she was meeting health and safety obligations.

As a small-business owner, Leyshon decided to approach WorkCover for advice on establishing everything from injury management systems, emergency evacuation plans and a formal safety induction program.

Implementing a health and safety program from scratch can be a daunting process for any small business but with no guidelines to follow, it was even tougher for Leyshon. However, focusing on simplicity, collaboration and accountability, she designed what has become award-winning practices.

"We are great at fixing cars but didn't know a lot about work health and safety," she says. "In an automotive workshop, you have to think about the safety of your staff

and your customers, so we were really keen to learn more about what we needed to do to ensure we were meeting our obligations."

Leyshon says involving the 10 staff, including two apprentices, in handling specific safety responsibilities and giving them all a role to play in work health and safety was instrumental in ensuring the practices worked.

"It was identified that we had a lack of appropriate processes for battery storage in our workshop, for example, so I allocated the responsibility of sourcing bunding [urethane-based product used in heavy-duty storage] and ensuring it met the safety requirements of the workshop to get my staff to start thinking about risk management in every aspect of their role," Leyshon says.

One issue for small-business owners, she says, is the need to know everything about what is going on in



their business then applying the, sometimes overwhelming, amount of knowledge to particular situations.

Production Automotive joined WorkCover's Safe Business is Good Business Mentor Program last year, which helped improve its performance and ensure it had the

right preventative measures in place. The business was assigned a mentor – the NSW State Transit Authority – which helped identify a series of gaps in its work practices.

"In just 12 months, we have established a culture that places a focus on staff safety and well-being. Staff are now not only aware of their requirements in terms of their role and performance but also in terms of reporting and both individual and corporate responsibility.

"My proudest moment was when my first-year mechanical apprentice, who is 18 years old, pointed out to me a faulty hose reel that could be a potential hazard to not only staff but vehicles. We replaced the hose reel straight away, which showed the staff that the business sees this as a priority and encourages them to be more aware," Leyshon says.

Production Automotive was also recently awarded the OHS Member of the Year from the NSW Motor Traders Association for its safety systems.

Keeli Cambourne

### BEST SOLUTION TO AN IDENTIFIED WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUE

## Bus innovation puts brakes on back injuries

Winner: **State Transit Authority**

IMAGINE the time-consuming task of having to change the airbags on a bus suspension system; add to that the difficulty in trying to manoeuvre the heavy bags around; then multiply that by 3000.

Maintenance work on the State Transit Authority's fleet of buses was a real pain in the back for the staff but an innovation to control a manual handling risk associated with the task has won the STA the award for

best solution to an identified work health and safety issue in this year's WorkCover SafeWork Awards.

It takes about 30 minutes to change the rubber airbags on a bus's pistons and STA general manager of safety, Angela Bateman, says the task causes injuries such as lumbar strain.



The Brookvale depot service manager, Matthew Haines, developed a solution to the problem that not only minimises the risk of injury to staff, it has also improved productivity and morale.

He researched the availability of an off-the-shelf solution and then worked with contractor Indertek to develop a scope for manufacturing their own bus suspension airbag assemblers.

The innovation has minimised the manual effort required to fit rubber airbags onto a piston and has significantly reduced the risk of strain and sprain injuries, dramatically improving efficiency.

"Our safety performance has improved over the past few years and we are identifying further ways of improving our safety management system by consulting with our employees and reviewing local and regional safety performance," Bateman says.

Keeli Cambourne



That's the ticket ... it is now easier and safer to fit rubber airbags to STA buses.



Online aid ... save time and money.

## New tool a boon to bosses

Estimator helps calculate compensation premiums, writes **Melinda Ham**.

PREMIUM Estimator, a new online tool developed by WorkCover NSW and available free on its website, enables businesses to estimate their annual workers' compensation premiums.

"Managing workers' compensation premiums can be a source of frustration and confusion for many small businesses," the chief executive of WorkCover, Lisa Hunt, says. So after consulting employer groups and businesses, WorkCover developed the tool, which will save employers time and money.

The estimator will also help businesses plan and test-drive different scenarios – such as adding or changing business activities and staff numbers or lodging a claim – to determine how compensation premiums are affected, Hunt says.

While developing the tool, WorkCover employed an accessibility specialist to ensure

'Managing ... premiums can be a source of frustration.' **Lisa Hunt, WorkCover chief executive**

people with different levels of vision and a range of other impairments could use it too.

So, this is how it works: employers click on the Premium Estimator tool, accept the disclaimer then ensure the tool is suitable for their business. This means the total annual wage bill is more than \$7500 and the business doesn't employ contractors or work hands-on with asbestos.

Employers then select their business activity. For example "pet grooming" has the WorkCover industry classification number 952600. The final step is to enter the total annual wages for the business and the estimator software calculates the WorkCover premium, including GST and the Dust Diseases payment

See [workcover.nsw.gov.au/insurancepremiums/premiums/premiestimator/Pages/default.aspx](http://workcover.nsw.gov.au/insurancepremiums/premiums/premiestimator/Pages/default.aspx)