

# Safe Work Australia Research agenda and activities

November 2015



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# Today's Presentation

- Why does Safe Work Australia conduct research?
- What research has Safe Work Australia done, is doing and plans to do?

# Research function under the *Safe Work Australia Act 2008*

The Act creates Safe Work Australia to improve occupational health and safety outcomes and workers' compensation arrangements in Australia

It gives Safe Work Australia several functions, including:

“to conduct and publish research relating to OHS and workers' compensation in order to inform the development or evaluation of policies in relation to those matters” (Function 8: Research etc.)

# Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012–2022

- Research and evaluation is one of the seven action areas identified to contribute to the delivery of outcomes of the Australian Strategy
- Four outcomes to be achieved by 2022:
  - reduced incidence of work-related death, injury and illness
  - reduced exposure to hazards and risks
  - improved hazard controls
  - improved work health and safety infrastructure



# Australian Strategy: Research & Evaluation

## Research and evaluation

Evidence-informed policy, programs and practice

- » Research and evaluation are targeted to provide the evidence to prioritise and progress areas of national interest.
- » Australia has an effective research and evaluation infrastructure and capacity.
- » Evidence is translated to assist practical application.
- » The results of research and evaluation are disseminated and implemented.



## Australian Strategy: Action Areas

Research and evaluation informs and is informed by the other action areas

- Healthy and safe by design
- Supply chains and networks
- Health and safety capabilities
- Leadership and culture
- Government
- Responsive and effective regulatory framework
- **Research and evaluation**



# Safe Work Australia Corporate Plan 2015–2019

The Agency's research functions are reflected in the Corporate Plan approved by Safe Work Australia Members

## Outcome

Healthier, safer and more productive workplaces through improvements to Australian work health and safety and workers' compensation arrangements

## Strategies to achieve the outcome

Support evidence informed policy, programs and practice through national work health and safety and workers' compensation data, research and evaluation programs (Strategy 3).

# Agency policy areas informing and informed by the research

## Occupational Hygiene Policy

- including asbestos, lead, noise, chemicals and major hazard facilities

## Plant & Licensing Policy

- including construction, plant, confined spaces and high risk work licensing

## Industry Policy

- including diving, electrical work, bullying, stevedoring, mining, agriculture, hazardous manual tasks and general workplace hazards



## **Explosives Policy**

- analysing and interpreting legislation relating to explosives in order to develop a nationally consistent explosives framework

## **WHS & Compensation Policy**

- Horizon scanning / emerging issues

## **Also ...**

### **Data & Analysis**

- Reporting on occupational injuries, fatalities and disease and workers' compensation



# So, why are we doing research?

To gain a better understanding of:

- Nature and distribution of workplace hazards
  - identifying populations at risk of injury or disease
  - examining causal factors for occupational diseases
- Why certain workers are still exposed to certain hazards
  - workplace safety culture / climate factors that are WHS barriers and enablers
- What solutions / interventions are available
  - identify WHS legislation, regulatory interventions and other strategies that work
- Whether or not interventions are working
  - if not why not?

# What research do we do?

## Using existing research data

Cross-sectional and longitudinal data created and maintained by academic researchers and institutions

- Australian Workplace Barometer (University of South Australia)
- Personality and Total Health (PATH) Through Life (Australian National University)
- Raine Study (Curtin University)
- Australian Workplace Exposure Study (Curtin University)
- Occupational skin disease database (Occupational Dermatology Clinic, Melbourne)

## Generating our own data

### National questionnaire surveys

- National Hazard Exposure Worker Surveillance (2008)
- Motivations, Attitudes, Perceptions and Skills (2009–10)
- Perceptions of Work Health and Safety (2012–13)
- Work Health and Safety Cost of Compliance (2013)
- Health and Safety at Work (2014)

### Semi-structured interview studies

- Impact of harmonisation on very large businesses with multi-state operations (2013)
- Experiences of non-employing, small and medium-sized businesses (2014)
- Limited cost-benefit analysis of model WHS laws (2014)

### Small-scale studies with specific industries / occupations / issues

- Occupational noise-induced hearing loss (2010)
- Residual chemicals in shipping containers (2012)
- Noise, dust, vibration and chemicals in agriculture (2015)

# Major recent surveys

Used mainly for the evaluation of the model WHS laws

## Perceptions of Work Health and Safety

- Questionnaire survey conducted by paper and online (by CATI for workers)
- September 2012 to January 2013
  
- 1572 business owners and senior managers
- 669 health and safety representatives
- 1311 workers
  
- Looked at perceptions, attitudes and experiences related to:
  - Performance of WHS duties
  - WHS information, communication and consultation



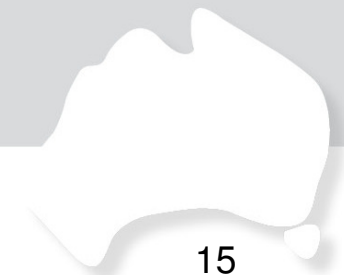
## Work Health and Safety Cost of Compliance (Regulatory Burden) Survey

- Questionnaire survey conducted by paper
- April to June 2013
  
- 1663 businesses
  
- Looked at:
  - Awareness of WHS obligations
  - WHS activities
  - Cost of and time spent on WHS activities
  - Reported impact of operating post-harmonisation



## Health and Safety at Work Survey

- Questionnaire survey conducted by paper and online
- June to August 2014
  
- 2350 businesses
  
- Looked at:
  - Cost of and time spent on WHS activities
  - Changes to WHS practices due to the model WHS laws
  - Impact on business due to the model WHS laws
  - WHS information and training



# Recent research publications

- Mindfulness of work health and safety in the workplace
- Sources of work health and safety information in Australian workplaces
- Transport industry: Synthesis of research findings
- Work productivity loss in young workers
- Work Health and Safety Perceptions: Manufacturing Industry
- Work Health and Safety Perceptions: Construction Industry
- Exposure to multiple hazards among Australian workers
- Attitudes towards risk taking and rule breaking in Australian workplaces
- Australian Work Exposures Study (AWES) - Formaldehyde
- Australian Work Exposures Study (AWES) - Lead and lead compounds
- Australian Work Exposures Study (AWES) - Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons





# 2015–16 Work Plan

- Hazard surveillance
  - Psychosocial hazards
  - Asthmagens
  - Shift work
- Supply chains impact
- Workplace culture
- Intervention effectiveness
  - MSDs
  - Falls prevention code of practice / platform ladders
  - WHS costs and activities



# Large surveys for 2016–17

## 2016 Health and Safety at Work

*Aug–Nov 2016*

- Regular monitoring of WHS activities, costs and regulatory burden to highlight policy issues
- Preparations underway for a national survey of businesses
  - Pilot survey of 1000 businesses
  - Finalisation of survey instrument and method
  - Sample of 10 000 businesses



# Large surveys for 2016–17

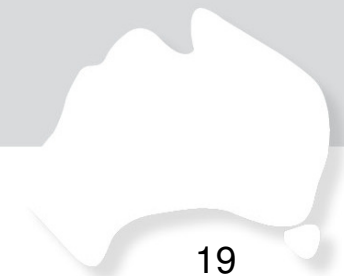
## 2017 Work Health and Safety Culture

*May–Aug 2017*

- Workplace culture factors that influence WHS behaviours
- Safe Work Australia collected information in 2009–10 and 2012–13 on WHS motivations, attitudes and perceptions
- Findings highlighted instances where attitudes are not changing as desired (e.g. continued focus on individual responsibility for injuries)
- Continued monitoring of WHS motivations, attitudes, perceptions and skills with a national survey of employers and workers
  - 4 years after the last data collection on WHS culture and perceptions



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# Reflections on

## Challenges

- Worker samples – lack of reliable frames
- Business samples – willingness / ability to participate
- Participant knowledge and insight – activities, hazards and costs
- Relevance of WHS – specific issues and target groups

## Opportunities

- Partnerships – stakeholders, academics
- Incremental evidence base – inform policy, design, supply chains, etc.
- Recognition and use of best practice – safety champions, case studies, etc.



# Questions?



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