

# Mining Industry Advisory Committee

## COMMUNIQUE

A summary of the 9 June 2021 meeting

### 1. Department of Health – COVID-19 and vaccine roll-out

Ms Katherine Flower, Stakeholder Engagement Lead from the COVID-19 Task Force, Department of Health, provided an update on the vaccination program in Western Australia. Vaccinations began on 22 February 2021 in WA, using the AstraZeneca vaccine. With limited supplies of Pfizer from the outset, this vaccine was offered only to specific groups.

The 9 June 2021 WA Government's announcement that anyone over 30 is now eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine will likely lead to a large spike in people who are ready and wanting their vaccination. Ms Flower advised that people over 50 could choose to wait for a Pfizer vaccine. There is an expectation that by the end of August general practitioners will be providing both AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccinations. There is now a 10-week forward view of Pfizer vaccine availability levels.

Ms Flower discussed the need to continue to promote the uptake of vaccinations, with strategies yet to be determined. The Chief Health Officer has expressed an aim to have 80 per cent of adults vaccinated with their first dose by 31 December 2021. Statistics of people who have had their first vaccination dose in WA as at 9 June 2021 are:

- 16-49 age group – 6.1 per cent
- 50-59 age group – 25.5 per cent
- 60-69 age group – 37.3 per cent
- Over 70 age group – 60 per cent

Anyone in Western Australia over 30 years of age can book a vaccination and, although vaccination centres in the Perth metro area are booked four to six weeks ahead, Ms Flower suggested using the booking system to register for a vaccine. The system is intuitive and can send messages about available appointments. There is also a “waiting room” for people waiting to make an appointment.

MIAC members sought information about opportunities to assist in the vaccine roll-out in remote WA, suggesting vaccinations could be administered at mine sites using a similar method to influenza vaccinations. Ms Flower noted the stringent Commonwealth requirements in setting up clinics and the limited workforce trained in administering the vaccinations. A clinic is already at the airport and it is possible to organise bulk vaccination of workers as they arrive from work shifts. In addition, bulk bookings could be made for groups where there is a country health service. Ms Flower **AGREED** to craft a message for MIAC members to circulate to mining sites.

## 2. Impact of economic cycles on safety performance in Western Australia

Ms Tanya Jenke, a PhD student at Edith Cowan University, presented research on the impact of economic cycles on safety performance in Western Australia. The research, based on 16 years of occupational injury data for Western Australia provided by Work Cover Western Australia, investigated why occupational injuries are occurring. The focus was on external factors and, in particular, the impact of economic cycles and resiliency of safety management systems.

Ms Jenke described the two types of behaviours occurring during economic cycles, Procyclical and Countercyclical, which impact differently on injury rates. Procyclical behaviour sees occupational injury rates increase as the economy grows and decrease during economic decline. Countercyclical behaviour is reversed, with the occupational injury rates decreasing as the economy grows and increasing during a decline. The research highlighted that the majority of economies, including Western Australia, work in a procyclical manner. The patterns observed in procyclical behavioural economies include more unskilled workers in the workplace during economic growth, creating a greater demand on workers to maintain a high output resulting in more injuries, while during an economic decline employees may under-report injuries for fear of being made redundant and fewer OHS professionals are employed.

From the data provided by Work Cover, Ms Jenke considered occupational injury rates for four specific industries; agriculture, mining, manufacturing and construction. Her findings indicate that mining, manufacturing and construction industries are most sensitive to changing economic cycles. The average occupational injury rate per 100 employees are:

- Agriculture = 2.92
- Mining = 4.00
- Manufacturing = 7.30
- Construction = 3.90

In relation to the Mining industry, the rate of occupational injury change in economic cycles was minimal at just 0.08 per cent. The mining and construction industry in Western Australia have larger global companies than manufacturing, which suggests more financial resources to withstand changes to the external environment.

Ms Jenke noted that the economic environment influences the availability of manpower and a change in the economy will impact organisations. Making sure they can cope with change is important as the number of people in the workforce will alter the risk. Ms Jenke highlighted the influence of economic cycles on safety performance and pointed to the impact of an economic decline such as that caused by COVID-19.

Ms Jenke's second research study used the 2014 Professor Michael Quinlan *10 Pathways in Death and Disaster* to query the perceptions of workers employed in the mining industry in Western Australia. Data from 2019-2020 showed the West Australian mining industry contributed AUS\$135.3 billion to the State economy, approximately 43 per cent of the State GDP, employed 140,000 workers in 2020 which is approximately 10 per cent of the WA

workforce. Between 2000 to 2020 there were 77 mining fatalities reported to the West Australian Government, 15 per cent of all workplace fatalities in WA.

The study included results from questionnaires at the 2018-20 Mines Safety Roadshows that probed employee's perception of their employer's effectiveness on fatality prevention. Over 2000 workers participated, with an average of 91 per cent response rate over 3 years. Seventy-one fatalities on the DMIRS fatality register between 2018 and 2020 were assessed to determine which of the 10 causal pathways defined by Quinlan led to each fatality. Analysis showed there are 4 pathways of particular interest:

- **Pathway 1:** design, engineering, technical and maintenance flaws, has the second lowest score from the questionnaire results and is the most common on the fatalities register;
- **Pathway 4:** failures in safety management systems, was the second most common pathway on the register;
- **Pathway 5:** failures in auditing, has the lowest score on the questionnaire and is the 5<sup>th</sup> most common pathway identified on the fatalities register; and
- **Pathway 9:** Poor management – worker communication and trust, was the third lowest mean in the questionnaire.

MIAC members raised factors that are also likely to have influence on the Pathways, including: resource and training decreases in times of economic down turn; unskilled workers; the limitations of the Work Cover dataset used, which only provides data of those who make a claim; the link between redundancy and making claims; and the impact of mental health during economic downturns. Ms Jenke said it is important to demonstrate there is an impact on safety through economic cycles, with the impact of COVID-19 anecdotally making people more aware of safety issues.

### **3. Report on work regarding stonemason exposure to silica**

Ms Sally North and Ms Eve Speyers of WorkSafe provided an update on the WorkSafe silica compliance campaign. Australia has had a prolific uptake of engineered stone which contains at least 90 per cent silica. When cut it generates a significant amount of silica dust, which was the reason the research focused on engineered stone. Dust management is an issue in workplaces that work with engineered stone, with many of the companies involved being smaller or sole operators. Dry cutting by installers places them in a high-risk category. Silica dust created by wall chasing has been of concern, with the work done in assay laboratories also requiring dust management.

The WorkSafe compliance campaign began in July 2018 after the re-emergence of silicosis cases nationally. The campaign focused on silica exposure to stone workers involved in engineered stone benchtop fabrication and installation. Since 2018, 150 workplace inspections have been conducted and more than 1000 notices issued. Air monitoring during inspections revealed mixed results with exposure varying from less than half of the exposure standard to 10 times the exposure standard.

Since 2018, 365 workers have participated in health surveillance, which identified 24 cases of silicosis in WA. Ninety of these workers participated in the WorkSafe Recall Project to

further analyse workers' lung health through use of low dose CT scans. From the 90 scans, seven new cases of silicosis (8%) were identified and 38 (42%) had other lung anomalies.

The results of the silica compliance campaign and Recall Project prompted changes to the OSH Regulations. On 15 January 2021, the requirement for chest X-rays (ILO classification) was replaced with low dose CT scans for health surveillance in WA.

Ms Speyers advised of enforcement action being taken regarding wall chasing and a planned proactive campaign regarding slurry clean up. Encountering wall chasing work in progress is difficult and an ongoing challenge for enforcement.

An Industry Member raised the possibility of considering conducting a similar recall project in the mining industry. The Chair noted that Mines Safety has been targeting mines with higher levels of silica in their ores to ensure appropriate methods are used, and advised some mines sites had been requested to provide testing for exposed workers.

#### 4. Strategy for Codes of Practice (CoP)

The minutes of the special meeting held on 12 May 2021 were presented.

MIAC member discussed prioritisation of CoP. Decisions made are included in the attached **Codes of Practice Table**. MIAC members agreed to:

- prioritise on the basis of *priority 1* being codes and materials that need to be available on commencement of the WHS legislation and *priority 2* being those that are to be reviewed during the first year after commencement;
- wait for Commission and Legislative Advisory Committee advice in relation to some general CoP (as indicated in the attached **Codes of Practice Table**);
- concentrate efforts on existing mining and new CoP and guidance material that need to be developed;
- preparation of initial draft codes and guidance material by DMIRS before seeking assistance from appropriate organisations and groups to review and provide advice on specific content;
- utilise content from existing publications and other jurisdictions where possible; and
- determine and specify to the Commission and LAC how some general CoP affect mining operations.

A MIAC member agreed to liaise with the Australian Drilling Industry Association (ADIA) to oversee review of the *Mineral Exploration Drilling CoP*.

The *Mine Safety Management System (MSMS) CoP* will be required at commencement of the WHS legislation, but there will be a transition period with one-year for development and a further year to implement. Some Principal Hazards are included in the MSMS.

The priority level of the proposed CoP *Roads and other vehicles area and traffic management* was debated along with other proposed CoP *Fire and explosion (PMH)* and *Inrush (PMH)*. Each was given a level 2 priority.

As not all CoP are likely to be completed by commencement of the WHS legislation, it was suggested work should commence out-of-session. MIAC members **AGREED** to consider advice out-of-session and meet when required to progress work on CoP.

## **5. Mines Safety Directorate: events of 2021**

The Chair reported on events to be held in 2021, noting that 56 submissions had been made to the 2021 Work Health and Safety Excellence Awards. Nominated judges will review submissions once the nominations are confirmed against category criteria.

## **6. Work Health and Safety (WHS) legislation**

The Chair provided an update on progress with the WHS legislation, noting the milestone achieved in the drafting instructions being sent to begin the drafting process. Six Departmental working groups, created to facilitate changes to systems, were working well in achieving the required milestones.

## **7. Mental Health**

The Chair highlighted a presentation by DMIRS on the Mentally Healthy Workplace audits that was made to the Chamber of Minerals and Energy.

## **8. Significant incident reports**

MIAC members were informed of the Significant Incident Report related to a near miss following unplanned movement of autonomous haul trucks during recovery operations and of a Mines Safety Bulletin released relating to the hazard of lightning strikes on vehicles.

## **9. Commission Report**

The Commission report provided information from meetings of 5 May and 2 June 2021, highlighting key items as the process for reviewing codes of practice for the work health and safety (WHS) legislation and the progress of other codes such as the *Violence and Aggression at Work* and *Workplace Behaviour Code of Practice*.

## **10. Towards 2020 Commitments**

The Chair provided an update on the Mines Safety Directorate's progress in achieving the *Beyond 2020* commitments, noting work is progressing to finalise the *Towards 2020* summary report across all former-RSD inspectorates although considerable resources are currently dedicated to preparing for the implementation of WHS legislation.

## **11. Next meeting: 11 August 2021**

For further information on the Mining Industry Advisory Committee, refer to the MIAC page on the DMIRS website:

<http://www.dmp.wa.gov.au/Safety/What-is-the-Mining-Industry-8578.aspx>.

Andrew Chaplyn – Chair