

WORKERS' HEALTH, IMPACT OF CHEMICALS

969. Hon J.A. SCOTT to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for State Development:

- (1) Are regulations governing emissions and their effect on mineworkers' health based on -
 - (a) individual impacts of a chemical;
 - (b) combined impacts of more than one chemical; or
 - (c) the synergistic effect of multiple chemicals?
- (2) If (a), when will the Department of Industry and Technology upgrade the regulations to ensure that the combined and synergistic effects of chemicals are taken into account in workers' health requirements?
- (3) Will a review of such regulations recognise that each person can be differently affected by chemical inhalations, rather than focusing on the so-called average worker?

Hon KEN TRAVERS replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

I am advised that -

- (1)
 - (a) The Mines Safety and Inspection Regulations apply the exposure standards detailed in the Worksafe Australia standard "National Exposure Standards for Atmospheric Contaminants in the Occupational Environment" - NOHSC:1003(1995) of the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission. Those exposure standards represent airborne concentrations of individual chemical substances.
 - (b) The guidance note, NOHSC:3008(1995), that accompanies the standard takes into account the additive effect of mixtures of substances in situations in which contaminants have the same target organ or mechanism of action.
 - (c) The same guidance note also recognises the possibility that the combined effect of multiple exposure may be considerably greater than the sum of the effect from the individual components. At present, the understanding of interaction effects is incomplete, and the aim is to maintain the concentrations of individual substances at a level that is as low as is practicable under the complex exposure conditions.
- (2) Worksafe Australia has a procedure in place to either add new exposure standards to the national list or review existing standards as new information becomes available.
- (3) The national exposure standards represent airborne concentrations of individual chemical substances, which, according to current knowledge, neither impair the health of nor cause undue discomfort to most workers.