



Office of
Industrial Relations

Department of Education

21 AUG 2018

Our Ref: F0000007077, R0000070226
Your Ref: A698047

The Honourable Adele Farina MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Public Administration
Western Australia Legislative Council
Email: lcco@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Ms Farina

Thank you for your letter dated 9 July 2018 requesting information as to how Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) collects and uses statistics. Please find the response to your questions below.

1.1 Does WHSQ collect its own statistics on the number of fatalities and Lost Time Injuries and Diseases (LTI/Ds) over periods of time to identify trends?

Yes – WHSQ within the Office of Industrial Relations (OIR) collects its own statistics on the number of fatalities and LTI/Ds occurring in Queensland workplaces in order to identify trends over time.

1.2 If the answer to question 1.1 is yes, what types of statistics are collected by WHSQ and how does WHSQ collect these statistics?

WHSQ requires workplaces to report all fatalities that occur in a workplace. A preliminary investigation is conducted to determine whether the specific fatality falls within the scope of work health and safety (WHS) laws. If so, a thorough investigation of the fatality takes place. While fatalities are monitored to identify trends, the small number of fatalities that occur make it difficult to identify any trends.

Under WHS laws, any workplace injury of sufficient severity has to be reported to WHSQ. If it is determined to be a matter for WHSQ, the incident is triaged for investigation by WHSQ inspectors. This data is monitored to identify trends. In addition to this, under the Queensland Workers' Compensation Scheme all insurers are required to provide selected claims data to the OIR for the purpose of monitoring injury and disease trends across the State.

The OIR also accesses data through the National Data Set (NDS), which is compiled and maintained by Safe Work Australia on an annual basis. The NDS is compiled independently from claims made under the various state, territory and Australian Government workers' compensation Acts. In Queensland, data provided to Safe Work Australia (SWA) for the NDS is independently reviewed and provided to WHSQ by the Office of the Government Statistician within Queensland Treasury.

1.3 If the answer to question 1.1 is no, where does WHSQ obtain its statistical data from?

Please refer to the response to Question 1.2 above.

1.4 How does WHSQ identify trends in workplace safety data or areas of concern?

WHSQ has a highly skilled data team who constantly examine workplace injury numbers, rates and costs using workers' compensation data across several categories of industry, occupation and injury type to identify and monitor trends in workplace safety.

Since 2011, the data team has applied a harm index which they have developed to incorporate the severity of claims into the monitoring process. The harm index is a ratio of total statutory costs (an indicator of severity) to the exposure (for example, number of workers covered) within a given cohort. The index provides an assessment of risk, representing the relative harm workers are likely to sustain during their working lives.

Currently, WHSQ monitors indexes by industry sector in the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) at the 3 digit level and occupations in the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) at the 3 digit level across two Census years.

In addition to this, inspectorate data is used to supplement findings in workers' compensation injury trends. Public notification data is used to identify and gauge areas of WHS concern raised by the general public.

1.5 How does WHSQ identify where to focus its priority investigations and initiatives? If you could provide the Committee with examples, that would be very useful.

The primary feature for identifying priority initiatives is a high injury rate, calculated by a high number of injuries or fatalities per 1,000 or 100,000 workers employed with particular focus on serious injuries (injuries with more than 5 days off work). This is the same method that SWA employs in its targets for the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy (2012-2022).

In recent years the injury rate has been supplemented by indexing relative average claim costs (harm index) to more accurately identify sectors where more serious injuries are being sustained by workers. As results based on this methodology may be influenced greatly by other factors, consideration is also given to the number of claims involved to indicate the extent to which inspectorate resources should be used on very high risk industries.

1.6 The Committee has heard evidence that businesses who do not want any recorded LTI/Ds are returning injured workers to light duties to avoid an injury being recorded as a LTI/D – is WHSQ aware of this in Queensland? If so, how prevalent is this practice and what if anything is being done by WHSQ to address this? What is being done by WHSQ to investigate where workers are assigned light duties after being injured at work?

The Queensland Workers' Compensation Scheme is designed to support workplace rehabilitation and return to work for injured workers. WHSQ within the OIR supports the position statement *Realising the Health Benefits of Work*, which highlights the fact that the longer someone is off work, the less likely they are to return to work.

Workplace rehabilitation means helping an injured worker back to safe, suitable work at the earliest possible time. This means finding the best ways for injured workers to keep their valuable work skills with the aim of returning to the jobs they had before their injuries (or other suitable jobs). If an injured worker is unable to return to their pre-injury job soon after their injury, a suitable duties program is developed to help the worker return to work safely over a period of time.

Queensland employers are required to take all reasonable steps to assist or provide an injured worker with rehabilitation for the period for which the worker is entitled to compensation. This includes providing suitable duties at work to allow the worker to remain at work after the injury or to achieve an early return to work.

If you require further information or assistance, please contact me on

Yours sincerely

Andrea Fox
Director
Work and Electrical Safety Policy
Office of Industrial Relations