



## HEALTH AND SAFETY TIMELINE — WHAT HAVE UNIONS ACHIEVED?

For over 160 years, unions have campaigned to reduce death, injury and illness at work. Many protections and rights we take for granted were fought for, and won by unions

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**1856** - The eight hour day was introduced after stonemasons took action in Melbourne to give workers eight hours work, leisure and sleep.

**1900** - Following agitation by unions, and outrage over high workplace death and injury rates, governments begin establishing Australia's first workers' compensation systems. Factory Acts were also passed after some mining disasters.

**1900-1916** – States and territories begin introducing specific laws on workers' compensation, for example the Workmen's Compensation Act 1900 (SA).

**1926** - NSW Government makes it compulsory for employers to have insurance, providing coverage for journey injuries incurred on the way to and from work, and establishes a Workers' Compensation Commission.

**1947** - The Conciliation and Arbitration Court awarded a 40 hour week to all Federal award employees.

**1958** - The Federated Iron Workers Association embarked upon a vigorous campaign to improve occupational health and safety in the steel industry.

**1960s-1970s** - Unions win a wide range of health and safety improvements at work. Meal and rest breaks, accident make-up pay, improved conditions in mines, protective clothing, and weight restrictions for lifting are just some of the achievements. Unions also campaigned against industrial deafness, asbestos exposure and for improved construction safety.

**1970s-1980s** - Unions expose the dangers of asbestos across a range of industries. Without unions there would be no ban on asbestos importation and exportation.

**1972 – 1989** - All state, territory and Federal governments introduce new OHS laws.

**1979-81** - Union members take strike action about health and safety - including the carcinogenic impact of working with Coke Ovens in Wollongong and the asbestos in Melbourne's Blue Harris Trains.

**1983** - Unions devise a detailed policy on chemical hazards at work and urge greater regulation of the estimated 1000-2000 new chemicals introduced to workplaces each year. Union activity leads to bans of some solvents in manufacturing industries.

**1980s** - Painting unions demand Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) - guidelines designed to limit exposure to chemicals at work. Employers refuse, leading to strikes. Unions continue to keep up the pressure to ensure MSDS contain

useful information and are they eventually included in Hazardous Substance Laws.

**1985** - Union campaigning to make sure that OHS representatives get the power to 'cease dangerous work' pays off with powers enshrined under a new OHS Act in Victoria. The 'cease work' right and powers to order Provisional Improvement Notices (PINs) face fierce opposition from employers but are now recognized as a crucial way to improve health and safety.

**1985** - The National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC) is set up to lead and coordinate national health and safety improvements. Unions, employer groups and government are represented on the Commission.

**1980s-1990s** - Unions begin to negotiate enterprise agreements with specific OHS provisions. (BHP, Williamstown naval dockyard, Victorian Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board, SECV, Government Aircraft Factory, Telecom and Australia Post.)

**1980s-1990s** - Unions also have success in showing that repetitive strain injury (RSI) is a genuine work-related injury across a number of blue and white collar occupations.

**1988** - Federal Government passes the *Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act* which establishes Comcare.

**1991** - NOHSC releases guidance on protecting workers from ultraviolet light - paving the way for workers to wear protective clothing and sunscreen if involved in outdoor work. Federal Government introduces the *OHS Act* covering Commonwealth employers.

**1997-98** - ACTU successfully pushes for a tough exposure standard for synthetic mineral fibres (SMF) and lead exposures for manufacturing workers. The SMF standard is recognized as the toughest in the world.

**1997-98** - The ACTU organises the first National Stress Free Day on October 22 as part of its campaign "Stress at Work: not what we bargained for".

**1999** - The Australian Nursing Federation in Victoria successfully lobbies the government for a campaign on manual lifting of patients resulting in a massive decline in injuries and savings for the health system. Other states follow the union's lead, adopting 'no lift' policies.

**1999** - ACTU launches its national campaign on dangerous hours.

**1990s- 2000s** - Unions oppose NSW, Victoria and South Australia government attempts to take away legal rights of workers and cut compensation payouts to injured workers.

**2000** - Workplace bullying is put on the agenda with an ACTU survey revealing 60% of workers saying bullying is affecting their home and social life. The ACTU launches its "Being bossed around is bad for your health" campaign.

**2001** - Unions continue their efforts to make James Hardie accountable for its failure to acknowledge the damage to workers' health and obligations to compensate workers affected by asbestos-related diseases. James Hardie establishes the Medical Research and Compensation Foundation.

**2001- 2005** - The Finance Sector Union in NSW takes successful legal action against three major banks - ANZ, CBA and Westpac - for breaches of the OHS laws in 2000, leading to improved security and a drop in armed robbery rates.

**2002** - The ACTU launches its Reasonable Hours Test Case and highlights the dangers of overwork.

**2004** - Asbestos finally banned in workplaces after a long-running union campaign and work with asbestos victims to make manufacturer James Hardie pay compensation.

**2005** - James Hardie and the NSW Government sign historic agreement, providing \$4.5 billion dollars in funding for Australia's asbestos victims.

**2005-2007** - Unions successfully lead Your Rights at Work campaign against Liberal Government's unfair WorkChoices laws and moves to undermine workers' award protections and the Federal Workers Compensation' scheme.

**2005-2009** - Unions continue to highlight the dangers of 'scheme swapping' where private sector employers self-insure through Comcare, escaping state and territory OHS laws and cutting workers entitlements.

**2006** - Beaconsfield Mine Disaster in Tasmania kills one miner and another two are trapped for 14 days triggering a renewed focus on mine safety. Unions not convinced mining employers have learnt lessons from the disaster.

**2006** - NSW nurses put the spotlight on heat-related OHS breaches and hospitals without cooling systems, and after a long-running campaign Newcastle Hospital agrees to new air-conditioning.

**2008** - COAG announces plan to harmonise the nation's health and safety laws. Unions make submission arguing that standards should be improved, not eroded, by the model laws.

**2008** - The South Australian government proposes changing the state's workers' compensation system to cut entitlements to injured workers, sparking campaign by unions.

**2009** - ACTU highlights the potential dangers of nanotechnology, calling for more regulation and labeling of products to protect workers and consumers.

**2009** - Unions launch "Don't risk second rate safety campaign" to protect Australian workers by lifting national health and safety standards to world's best.