

# Health and Safety at Work Strategy misses mark - MinEx

Georgia Quirke-Luping - Tue, 29 Jan 2019

MinEx chief executive Wayne Scott says his suggestions on the Government's new Health and Safety at Work Strategy have fallen on deaf ears.



Officials "missed a good opportunity to connect with the extractives sector," Scott said in an interview with *Inside Resources* last Friday.

Instead of prioritising engagement with existing industry bodies, and addressing workplace health and safety risks directly, the [Strategy](#) focuses on at-risk demographic groups, and employing more health and safety staff and hiring consultants.

Unhappy with parts of the draft, MinEx had developed a five-page submission, setting out recommendations on behalf of the extractives industry.

But Scott says "very little has changed between the initial proposal and the final document. Neither quarrying nor mining are mentioned in the Strategy, which leaves me to wonder whether we are a priority any more. We cannot afford to lose momentum in this area".

## The Strategy

Workplace Relations and Safety Minister Iain Lees-Galloway released the final document in early December, which "sets the direction for health and safety improvements over the next ten years".

The Strategy comes eight months after the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment called for submissions on a draft, with 127 received.

The Strategy says young people, older people, migrants, Maori and Pasifika, and small business workers are the most 'at risk' of health and safety issues at a workplace.

"They may not be familiar with their employment rights and may be fearful of complaining," the Strategy says. "They may be prepared to put up with poor working conditions."

To tackle these issues, the Strategy calls for increased numbers of health and safety educators and practitioners because "specialists can bring their expert knowledge and skills to assist businesses effectively".

## Identifying at-risk demographics is the wrong focus

Scott challenges the Strategy's assertion that certain demographics are more at risk than others.

"Jobs are not riskier than others because an older person within a small business happens to be doing it; jobs are risky because they are risky."

Scott argues, by way of an example, that it does not matter *who* is operating the machinery – it is the machinery itself that presents the hazards and thus needs to be managed.

"The focus on workers at greater risk is a reflection of the industries they work in. The focus should be on these industries and jobs, rather than on the demographic group of workers."

## Roles and responsibilities

Scott says instead of allocating resources towards employing more health and safety staff and hiring consultants, there should be stronger support for industry associations to "promote and support worker-driven improvements in health and safety".

"We do not need more health and safety professionals. Industry leaders and support staff need improved skills and knowledge in developing and implementing effective safety management systems. The focus needs to be on educating managers who are responsible for, and make decisions on, health and safety.

"The British Aggregates Association has an effective peer review system, where all members take responsibility for checking on the health and safety of fellow quarries", Scott said.

"This is impactful because the reviews are done by people who know quarrying inside and out, and it feels less like a lecture from the 'suit and ties'."

"Industry self-regulation from people who understand extractives and are in the business day-to-day will be more useful".

## Poor performance

The Strategy is clear in its goal to improve measurability of issues in health and safety.

In his press statement in December, Lees-Galloway stated that "there are still 50 to 60 deaths from work injuries each year, and 600 to 900 deaths from exposures to health risks associated with their work".

Scott argues that while it is beneficial to have a system that measures poor or good performance, the implication that "poor performance" is linked to the number of fatalities within a sector is "fundamentally flawed".

This year, there were no fatalities within New Zealand's extractives sector – which, when framed through the lens of the new Strategy, seems to indicate the industry performed well.

However, between October 2017 and September 2018 close to one-sixth of reported incidents were due to breach of procedure, including failing to stop at stop signs, or neglecting to engage proper shut down processes when leaving a vehicle.

“We have been lucky,” Scott said. “It is a numbers game: the more accidents that happen, the higher the chance of one being fatal”.

With this in mind, the MinEx submission called for “less traditional measures, such as events or incidents that may be precursors to fatalities or serious harm”, rather than number of fatalities alone.

### **Next steps**

In a [press release](#) in December, Lees-Galloway said the next step for the Health and Safety at Work Strategy was to develop an action plan.

It is expected that this document will be published in the coming months, and will flesh out the finer details of the Strategy.

The Plan will also see the enactment of a health and safety alliance team, made up of WorkSafe, MBIE and other stakeholders.

Yesterday, the Victoria University of Wellington [announced](#) that, in partnership with WorkSafe, they had developed new qualifications for the 2019 academic year: a postgraduate certificate, a postgraduate diploma and a Master of Health, in [workplace health and safety](#)