

COMMENT



Industry need to be on guard

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COMMENT, CONTRACTOR

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I'm issuing a challenge to our extractive sector for some poor performance on guarding machinery which puts people at risk.

And I hope it shows WorkSafe and its Minister, Iain Lees-Galloway, that it can reduce such risks if they change course in finalising their new H+S strategy.

Last November, 21-year-old father of one, Connor Milne died in a quarry accident. As it happens it was in Australia, but it could so easily have been here.

Perhaps it could have been at this pictured North Island quarry site, which I happened to see recently in real estate advertisements. Note the unguarded and exposed tail drum on the crusher.

This breaches just about every rule there is on having guarded machinery. It was a similarly unguarded piece of machinery that entangled Connor Milne and ended his life.

Somehow, those managing and perhaps also those working at this North Island quarry have not seen a problem here, though it sticks out like a pair of proverbials.

Everyone in the extractives sector needs to understand that operating plant without appropriate guarding puts limbs and lives at risk.

I urge anyone reading this column who operates such machinery – in the quarry sector or anywhere else – to immediately go and see if you have guarding in place.

Sadly, too often people don't follow up even when warnings are provided.

Recently Rotorua timber company Claymark had two similar serious injuries. A worker's hand had to be amputated after it was drawn into a wood planer at the business' Thames plant.

WorkSafe inspectors found the guard supplied by the manufacturer sitting in a cupboard above the planer; there was no system of regular inspection to ensure guards were present and functional.

Then, within three months, a worker at the company's Rotorua site had his hand caught in machinery used to de-stack timber when trying to reinstate a dislodged chain. He lost the tips of his middle, index and little fingers.

Claymark had a court impose over \$680,000 in fines, reparations and costs.

So what is the link here to the Government's new Health and Safety at Work Strategy?

Well, regrettably despite MinEx making an extensive submission last year there's little sign we have been listened to by MBIE and WorkSafe.

Neither quarrying nor mining are mentioned in the new Health and Safety at Work Strategy.

That's concerning.

We've made some real progress in our sector and we don't want to lose momentum. Rather than it being a key priority to engage with industry bodies like MinEx to allow workplace H&S issues to be addressed directly, the Strategy focuses on at-risk demographic groups, employing and educating more health and safety staff and consultants.

That's not a solution.

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

The focus on workers at greater risk is a reflection of the industries they work in, not any demographic group of workers. It does not matter *who* is operating the machinery – it is the machinery itself that presents the hazards and thus needs to be managed.

Instead of allocating resources towards employing more health and safety staff and hiring consultants, we should see stronger support for MinEx and similar industry organisations which promote and support worker-driven improvements in health and safety.

That said, I do acknowledge the value in having WorkSafe inspectors with experience in the extractives sector, being retained. We do need some policemen on the job – just not more people sitting in offices.

What we do have are industry leaders and support staff who 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.

I'm a great fan of mentors and have set up a good system for this in quarrying. I also like peer review such as operated in the UK by the British Aggregates Association where all members take responsibility for checking on the health and safety of fellow quarries.

This works much better than more 'suit and ties'.

I note that the Victoria University has just announced a partnership with WorkSafe for a postgraduate certificate, a postgraduate diploma and a Master of Health, in workplace health and safety.

Sorry, but more people with degrees in H&S won't deliver the same benefits as working with experienced industry people who can work with companies on issues such as guarding machinery.

Please Minister, take notice. More people in offices won't deliver what you and I both want.