

Paul Hunt wants you to talk more

Cameron Massey - Tue, 21 Aug 2018

The extractives industry must better communicate to improve its health and safety record, WorkSafe's new chief inspector extractives says.

The total recordable injury frequency rate for New Zealand across all extractives industries is 7.58 per million hours worked. The sector has a workplace fatality rate of about 10 for every 100,000 workers.

Paul Hunt says the introduction of continuing professional development has forced a lot of talking and has been a major success in the training requirements for the A and B Grade tickets.

He acknowledges that once sector meetings and training events might have drawn a dozen people, they now attract upwards of 100 participants.

But he says the industry needs to make a step change in attitude towards health and safety.

"Any change process for any issue needs to have a lot of communication and difficult conversations."

Communication is key

Of particular concern to him is operators that are trying hard and who think they're doing a great job improving their sites.

"One of the problems I have is that they're throwing money at things that I would argue was not the most important thing, or undertaking an improvement to the wrong standard."

He says owners and operators need to talk about who is a good supplier, who does the right job or who knows what is actually required.

"In my career, I've never once asked a competitor a question about safety that they haven't answered. Most companies I know are very free and generous about sharing advice about safety."

Attitude adjustment

While Hunt has been told from industry members that the issue will take many years and even generations to change, he believes the culture can be adjusted for the better within five years.

"It's just simple human nature, if it's really important to your boss, then it's really important to you."

He says every time a boss, supervisor, a manager or an owner of an operation walks past something that is unsafe or needs attention and shrugs their shoulders and doesn't respond to it, the right message is not sent.

"The reaction shouldn't be afterwards; the reaction should always be immediate. It's got to be a strong reaction and it has to be immediate."

Everyone is involved

Employers have an obligation to train every single person so they're competent enough to not make mistakes, or so if mistakes are made they don't end up harming anyone, Hunt says.

"Too often I hear people say it's a real problem, 'how can we make it so safe that every single worker does everything right'," he says.

"You can't have that attitude or you set yourself up to fail."

He is encouraging mine and quarry managers to admit that they may not know everything and be willing to put their hands up and ask for help.

He says the same applies to workers and everyone has moral obligations to look after their own and others' safety while at work.

"Once you get people on that level, they realise that they're not doing this because Paul Hunt the chief inspector is going to give a fine or a prosecution, that you're actually looking after your fellow workers, and you're looking after your workforce."

Critical risk

Hunt says WorkSafe is not going to focus on people "tripping over in the smoko shed", instead target instances of critical risk that can seriously harm or kill people.

"People have to look at eliminating risks before they start thinking about minimising them."

He believes the risk-based regulations are good and that people are starting to understand them.

"I'm getting the impression that as time goes on, the industry will get new people with B Grade and A Grade tickets and they'll become the ascendency."



“These new people have done all the unit standards, done the risk management training, and their influence is starting to show in the industry.”