

Small sites don't need formal H&S reps – MinEx

Colin Williscroft - Fri, 17 Feb 2023

Health and safety representatives or committees may make sense for larger workforces but they are not relevant where the workforce is small, MinEx says.

The extractives sector health and safety council does not support a bill before Parliament that will allow workers in a business with fewer than 20 workers to request health and safety representatives or committees.

The mining, quarrying and tunneling sectors are made up of over 1200 businesses, 95 per cent of which employ three workers or less, MinEx says in a submission on the Health and Safety at Work (Health and Safety Representatives and Committees) Amendment Bill.

Chief executive Wayne Scott says smaller organisations have the benefit of staff working in much closer-knit environments where communication is good and often informal.

“As such, health and safety involves all without the need for formal committees or health and safety representation.”

Lack of resources

Scott says smaller employers lack the resources needed to organise elections for a health and safety representative and have insufficient personnel to warrant establishing a committee.

“Workers are required to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and a person conducting a business or undertaking must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the health and safety of all persons is not put at risk from work carried at the site.

“These obligations are not avoided because smaller sites are not required to have a health and safety representative or appoint a health and safety committee.”

Scott says MinEx does not consider the bill is necessary and if it does proceed it should include a right for employers – as now – to refuse a request for a representative or a committee, but also require them to provide reasons for their refusal – such as insufficient employee numbers to make accommodating a request feasible.

