

Press Release - CEO's Cluster On H&S

Transport unions demand place for workers in health and safety group

Joint media release Rail and Maritime Transport Union/Maritime Union of New Zealand FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Tuesday 11 August 2009

Transport workers have questioned why workers have not been invited to join a new health and safety group being set up by the Minister of Labour.

Two of New Zealand's leading transport unions, the Maritime Union of New Zealand (MUNZ) and the Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU), are demanding the Government include worker representatives on the working group comprising of CEO's of big business and Government agencies.

The Minister of Labour Kate Wilkinson will meet with executives tomorrow to discuss the formation of a "Chief Executives Forum on Health and Safety."

Provisional figures show the Department of Labour has investigated 55 work related deaths in the year to June.

Maritime Union General Secretary Trevor Hanson says unions support all moves to reduce the number of workers killed and hurt on the job, but says workers have a right to have their voices heard, not just managers.

"There's one problem here – this proposed group is missing the people who get hurt and killed on the job, who are workers, generally not chief executives or Government agents."

Mr Hanson says private business have a conflict of interest because "down at the coal face" health and safety measures were often seen as a drain on profits.

He says that unions are the strongest advocate for health and safety because they are made up of people who want to go home at night in one piece to see their families.

"The Minister is correct when she says business executives are in a prime position to influence attitudes and practices. The only problem is in our experience this influence has often been negative as some companies we have seen place profits over health and safety, especially through contracting out and similar practices."

Rail and Maritime Union National Secretary Wayne Butson says that the heavy transport industry had suffered many deaths and injuries over the years.

"Workers in the heavy transport area, in rail and maritime sectors, confront this everyday and to ignore their experience and input is not the correct way to go. We don't need another box ticking outfit having a leisurely discussion on the health and safety of workers from an air- conditioned boardroom."

Mr Butson says without the involvement of unions, representing tens of thousands of workers, any health and safety initiatives will not succeed.

"We are saying to the Minister – we want workers to be at the table giving their views on decisions that will affect them. This will show the Government has a genuine commitment to all New Zealanders and not just a select few."

"If bosses could fix health and safety on their own then it would be fixed by now."

Mr Butson says rail had a terrible record for safety, until a ministerial inquiry investigated the problem and recommended Management and the union had to work together to improve health and safety.

"We have done this and the stats have been completely turned around."

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