



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 05 September 2019

South Australia's toxic safety culture putting workers at risk

South Australian construction workers are being put at risk due to a toxic safety culture and a regulator that fails to seriously investigate safety breaches and “literally phones it in” rather than inspect unsafe sites, warns the CFMEU National Construction Division.

“It is only a matter of time before there is another avoidable fatality at a construction site in SA,” said CFMEU National Construction Assistant Secretary, Andrew Sutherland.

“On Wednesday 04 September a worker was injured at the Palumbo site in the city. The union attended the same site two weeks ago and identified numerous safety breaches requiring immediate action, but nothing was done.”

“We see the same thing playing out time after time in South Australia. There is a toxic attitude to safety held by too many South Australian builders who know that the regulator is unlikely to properly investigate safety breaches, let alone take action against them.”

“The union has raised repeated concerns with SafeWork SA over the regulator’s practice of ‘investigating’ safety breaches raised by union officials and workers by phoning the builder and asking if there is a problem.”

“CFMEU officials have been left stunned in meetings where builders have spoken on the phone to SafeWork SA and the regulator has told them that they do not need to investigate based solely on the builder’s assurances that there are no problems on the site.”

“It is outrageous that dodgy builders get to ‘phone a friend’ in the regulator and avoid acting to protect worker safety,” said Andrew Sutherland.

“This is exactly the type of behaviour and culture that last year’s ICAC SA investigation into SafeWork warned ‘could lead to catastrophic consequences for workers’. It is appalling that the regulator continues to flout ICAC’s findings.”

The union has highlighted SafeWork SA’s lamentable prosecution record and the ongoing failure to implement the recommendations of the ICAC investigation into the organisation as evidence that safety is not taken seriously in the SA construction industry.

“SafeWork SA has run four successful prosecutions in 2019. They had a total of five in 2018 and 11 in 2017. Contrast that to Victoria where the regulator has conducted 110 prosecutions in 2019 alone.”

“The union is now in the position of taking legal action against builders where the regulator has failed to act. The recent court action the CFMEU launched against Kyren Group over the refusal to allow safety inspections on one of Adelaide's biggest construction sites is a case in point.”

“Union officials saw workers on The Adelaidean site installing window facades without harnesses, and leaning over the edge of the building while trying to manoeuvre glass panes. When union officials attempted to inspect the site they were refused entry and abused by a site manager who tore up their right of entry permits.”

“These attitudes are all too common on SA building sites. Some union officials are now wearing recording devices such as GoPros when they go on worksites to document the bad behaviour of confrontational builders who do not understand that they are required to allow lawful entry to conduct safety inspections.”

“South Australian construction workers deserve to have their health and safety taken seriously. They need a regulator that will act against the cowboy operators in South Australia who treat safety as a joke.”

Contact: John Kelly 0407 071 703