

**Submission  
No 50**

## **INQUIRY INTO FUNERAL INDUSTRY**

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**Telephone:**  
**Date Received:** 20/06/2005

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**Theme:**

**Summary**



Ref: GM00528/05

20 JUN 2005

The Director  
Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir or Madam

I refer to the letter of 18 April 2005 from Ms Burnswoods MLC, Committee Chair, regarding the Inquiry into the Funeral Industry being undertaken by the Standing Committee on Social Issues.

I welcome the invitation to make a submission on the important issues raised by the inquiry terms of reference.

The terms of reference for the Inquiry into the Funeral Industry have only limited impact on the jurisdiction of WorkCover NSW. In relation to the Committee's investigation into the adequacy of existing regulation of the funeral industry to protect consumers, public health and employees, the legislation administered by WorkCover is primarily concerned with the health and safety of employees.

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000* and *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001* adopt a performance-based approach that allows industry the greatest possible flexibility to achieve safe working environments, while also prescribing specific control measures for high-risk areas and fundamental safety requirements. High-risk areas relevant to the funeral industry, in particular, manual handling and hazardous substances are specifically addressed in the regulation.

The legislation emphasises systematic risk management and consultation with workers. Generally employers are required to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees, including:

- providing a safe premises;
- providing safe systems of work;
- providing suitable working environment and facilities; and
- providing information, instruction, training and supervision to workers.

WorkCover promotes safer and healthier workplaces for workers. It enforces the occupational health and safety legislation through education, inspections, investigations into incidents and complaints and, when necessary, applies penalties and prosecutions. The close working relationship between WorkCover and industry groups have resulted in improved safety outcomes in the funeral industry.

WorkCover. **Watching out for you.**

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To further assist in making workplaces safer, WorkCover provides practical assistance and advice to small and medium sized enterprises, including within the funeral industry through its Business Assistance Unit. The unit provides seminars, demonstrations and workshops around NSW.

The following workers compensation claims statistics on major work related injuries and occupational diseases within the funeral industry may be of interest to the Committee. The figures show a reduction in workplace injuries and a fairly constant number of claims resulting from occupational diseases over the five years to June 2003.

The majority of claims were for sprains and strains of joints and adjacent muscles, typically as a result of lifting, carrying or putting down objects.

**Major Workplace Injuries and Occupational Diseases  
Incidence Rates within the Funeral Industry per \$Million Wages**

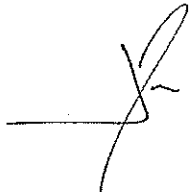
CLAIMS STATISTICS	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03
Occupational diseases	0.17	0.14	0.15	0.15	0.15
Workplace injuries	0.65	0.49	0.55	0.51	0.33
Total	0.82	0.63	0.70	0.66	0.48

Source: WorkCover NSW. Please note that the data may be subject to change due to the progression of workers compensation claims over time.

The Committee may also be interested to know that the workers compensation system administered by WorkCover provides funeral benefits to the families of workers in the unfortunate event of a workplace fatality. These benefits were recently increased to take into account increases in funeral and related expenses. From 19 November 2004, the maximum amount payable for reasonable funeral expenses is \$9,000 under the *Workers Compensation Act 1987*.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely



Jon Blackwell  
**Chief Executive Officer**