

# SafetyWA

WEST AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

## Violence Against WA Teachers

### Department & union form working party

The Education Department and the State School Teachers' Union have joined forces in an effort to minimise assaults and harassment against Western Australia's teaching community.

The department employs the State's biggest workforce with 30,000 staff overseeing 250,000 students at 800 sites.

A joint working party, involving both departmental and union representatives, has been established to develop a resource guide to provide assistance and information to schools about effective strategies to prevent classroom violence.

The Education Department has revealed that over the last three years, staff have made 249 compensation claims for assaults.

The union is particularly concerned that aggressive behaviour is moving down the age range, so that today there are even children in years one and two whose behaviour is sometimes out of control.

Union president Mike Keely describes the level of stress on teachers who have to deal with such children as "enormous". He told SafetyWA that the increasing amounts of aggression and physical violence from such young children towards teachers is similar to that occasionally experienced 20 years ago in Years 8 and 9.

"A teacher who is already concerned about his or her own safety, confronted by an unruly child, must also be responsible for the safety of up to 29 other children", he says.

Mike Keely believes that the Department of Education must take a more active and interventionist role in supporting schools in dealing with aggressive children.

Although he says there is a real and understandable reluctance to remove such children from the school and place them in an institution, a way has to be found to make the classrooms safe places of learning.

The Teachers' Union says there are some children attending schools whose aggressive behaviour is such that it is totally unacceptable for other students and teachers.

"We are discussing ways of dealing with kids whose level of violence is simply something we cannot expect them, other kids, or the schools to cope with."

Mike Keely believes it is essential to give maximum support and assistance to schools where the problem is most acute.

If this isn't done, he has no doubt about the ramifications. "If you don't deal with it now", he says, "it is going to come back and bite you in 10 or 15 years time when these little kids have gone through traumatic adolescence and become adults who behave badly."

The head of the Department of Education's Management Support Unit, Graeme Jones, told SafetyWA that there were a number of programs to assist department staff.

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# Onerous responsibilities

## Controlling a Workplace

By Maria Saraceni, Partner, Workplace Relations, Jackson McDonald

Any person who exerts any degree of control over a workplace has onerous responsibilities to ensure a safe place of work. The Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984 (WA) specifically places obligations on employers (s19), controllers of workplaces (s22), principals (s23D(2)) and those engaging labour hire workers (s23E(2)), for matters over which they have the capacity to exercise control.

Two recent decisions indicate the scope of this obligation and confirm that any legal right to exercise control over a workplace, regardless of other practical considerations, imposes both obligations and, potentially, liability.

*Rodney Morrison v Eureka Opals Pty Ltd* [2005] NSWIRComm 437

Eureka Opals Pty Limited was charged with failing to ensure a safe place of work following the serious injury of a person (not its employee) working on its registered mining claim. The claim was operated by a relative of the directors who had no official role with Eureka. Eureka's assertion that it had no control over the workplace succeeded before the magistrate who determined the company did not have the "practical ability" to control the operations. This was overturned on appeal.

The Full Bench of the Industrial Relations Commission of New South Wales held that the judge at first instance:

*"erred in finding that the respondent had no more than a 'technical legal right' to restrict access to the claim and, therefore, no practical ability to control mining activity ... the respondent had certain legal rights and obligations that were not transferable whilst it held the title to the claim. The 'technical legal right' was a substantive obligation on the respondent, grounded in legislation, to conduct the mining operation safely".*

The Full Bench found that the company was "in control" and despite having felt "personally constrained in intervening", it was legally obliged to direct actions to ensure safety. "Control" extended to those who have the right to control, regardless of "practical" restrictions in their ability to do so.

*Morrison v De Bono* [2005] WASC 271

An owner-builder (of a domestic residence) was prosecuted as the controller of a workplace for failing to ensure that those at the workplace were not exposed to hazards (s22). During construction, a void between the first floor and ground floor (where the stairs

would go) was left unguarded.

An employee of a contractor (engaged to install plaster walls and ceilings) fell through the void, sustaining serious injuries.

The owner-builder asserted that he had released control of the site to the contractor and was therefore not liable. The court held that the contractor did not have exclusive possession of the site and therefore, the owner-builder still had control and responsibility for the site.

The contractor and the owner-builder had discussed site safety and the contractor committed to ensuring site safety. However, this did not pass responsibility solely to the contractor. The court held that even if the void had been specifically discussed and the contractor had agreed to ensure adequate protection from that hazard, the owner-builder would still be obliged to ensure the contractor's promise was carried out.

*Those who have "mere technical legal rights" to control a workplace, or who retain control over a workplace to any degree must ensure that they are exercising those rights to ensure hazards are identified, assessed and managed.*



Maria Saraceni

## New OSH minister

Responsibility for occupational safety and health in Western Australia has moved to a different state government minister.

In the wake of the sudden resignation of the former Premier, Geoff Gallop, the new Premier, Alan Carpenter, has re-shuffled some portfolios.

OSH is part of the employment protection portfolio which switches to the member for Murchison-Eyre, John Bowler.

He is already the Minister for Resources and Assisting the Minister for State Development. He also has special responsibility for the Goldfields-Esperance and Great Southern regions of WA.

John Bowler, 56, a former journalist, has been in Parliament for five years.



John Bowler

# Safety regulation in WA

By Matt Birney, State Opposition Leader.



Matt Birney

Nobody would argue that people who go to work have the right to arrive home safely, regardless of the industry they work in.

The Liberal Party is keen to see Western Australia lead the world in preventing occupational injuries and fatalities.

The recent death of a mineworker in an explosion at Leinster shows that there is still some work to do in this area. It was the third underground death and the fourth mining fatality this financial year.

The State Government has indicated that it will consider legislative changes to improve safety in the mining industry, a move supported by the Liberal Party.

The government has an obligation to ensure that workplaces in all industries are sustainable, safe and healthy and are designed to keep work-related deaths and injuries to an absolute minimum. Unfortunately, the government has washed its hands of that obligation when it comes to safety regulation in the electrical and gas industries in Western Australia.

Labor introduced the Energy Safety Levy Bill in State Parliament last year, which would effectively end the Government's financial contribution to the regulation of safety in these industries. Instead, companies in the electrical and gas industries will pay a levy to fund the operations of the regulator, EnergySafety.

The new levy will raise \$4.4 million from large power suppliers, including Western Power and those on mine sites, and gas distributors such as Alinta Gas.

Apart from introducing a new tax on energy suppliers and consumers when it is enjoying record revenue windfalls, the government is shirking its responsibility to fund the safety regulator for the industry.

Labor says that it is essential that an adequate legislative and regulatory framework exists to ensure minimum standards of safety and performance are met in the industry.

But why does Labor refuse to continue funding the regulator, which has been funded from the government's consolidated revenue since its inception?

Most companies in Western Australia's energy sector already spend a significant amount on occupational safety and health, and EnergySafety already receives some of its income from licence fees paid by electrical and gas contractors.

This levy will put an extra burden on the industry, which will in turn pass on the cost of the levy to consumers.

Alinta Gas has already indicated it will have to pass the cost of the levy on to consumers, including households.

The legislation gives the Minister the power to set the amount and allocation of the levy on electricity and gas supply industry participants.

The government is sure to use the levy as a convenient revenue raiser, with the former Employment and Consumer Protection Minister John Kobelke failing to guarantee in State Parliament last year that the levy would not be increased in the future.

EnergySafe is primarily a service to the community. We all benefit from safe energy supply systems, safe and efficient energy installations and appliances, safety promotion and related emergency management work.

Instead of subjecting industry to a new tax with all of its inefficiencies, administrative and compliance costs, the government should just leave things as they are and continue to fund the regulator.

## Work safety awards

New awards recognising outstanding OSH performance in WA workplaces are to be made by WorkSafe later this year.

Entries may be made in three categories:

- Best workplace OSH management system;
- Best solution to an identified workplace OSH issue; and
- Best workplace OSH practices in small business.

The award comprises a trophy for each category, which is presented by the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection at the annual Safety Achievers Dinner in October.

Winners are automatically entered into the National Safety Awards.

Entry forms are available on the WorkSafe website – [www.worksafe.wa.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.wa.gov.au). Entries close on 30 June 2006.



# Contractor safety

## Aiming for AS 4801

Safely managing an \$18-billion asset that most of us use every day is the continuous challenge facing senior executives at Main Roads Western Australia.

And it is an even greater challenge at a time when the organisation has undergone major change from being a builder and maintainer of the State's extensive road system to one which is now a road asset manager.

In 2007, Main Roads celebrates its 80th anniversary, the first full year that the corporation expects to be AS 4801 compliant.

The Executive Director, Major Projects Phil Ladner told IFAP's 2005 SafetyWA Conference that Main Roads looked after about 18,000 kilometres of highways and roads across WA.

Safety was once well down the agenda when corporate executives met, he said, but was now always the first item dealt with, and Main Roads demanded that its contractors also give safety the No. 1 priority.

Phil Ladner is proud of the corporation's improved safety record (see graphics) and said the lost time injury frequency rate had drifted lower as Main Roads downsized. It dropped as low as zero



Phil Ladner, Main Roads

by 2003 but had since developed a concerning upward trend.

The Main Roads' senior executive is very pleased with the safety performance of Main Roads' contractors whose LTIFR is running under four after being nearly double that figure five years ago. When network maintenance contractors are removed from the statistics, the construction contractors' LTIFR drops to below 1.8.

"Clearly, our contractors are performing much better than Main Roads does, internally", he said.

A significant contributor to the substantially improved figures has been the introduction in 1995 of a pre-qualification tender process.

Phil Ladner said that before then anyone could bid for Main Roads contracts.

"A contractor could be the successful tenderer by submitting a low price, but if the safety performance wasn't up to scratch it meant a struggle to lift the contractor up to an acceptable level", he said.

Main Roads contractors all need to have third party certification to AS4801 and they are required to meet a very detailed safety specification, spelling out what they must do in generating a safety plan for each contract and how they need to implement it.

Phil Ladner described this as one of the most significant items that has contributed to contractors' good performance.

In addition, he said that before contractors could start on road construction jobs, their OSH and traffic management plans, which are both very closely related to safety, must be cleared by Main Roads auditors. During the project, compliance audits were also carried out.

Contractors could draw on the corporation's auditing panel at any time during the construction phase so that they could get expert advice on any issue that may arise.

In performance reporting, Main Roads continues to rely on lag indicators, but has implemented a program to change its methods to embrace a pertinent set of lead indicators.

Working parallel with its strategy to achieve AS 4801 certification by the end of 2006, Main Roads is ensuring that the corporation has effective internal communications.

This is aimed at enabling its safety committee, both at head office and the regions to not only be aware of decisions of the corporate OSH committee, but to provide feedback of their concerns. A dedicated intranet website is being established to maintain a high safety profile and provide a focus on safety information.

Phil Ladner explained that Main Roads had recently created a training needs analysis and was currently assessing the training program elements to be included.

He said that while there were plenty of off-the-shelf training packages, it was essential to implement a program which is tailored specifically to Main Roads' needs.

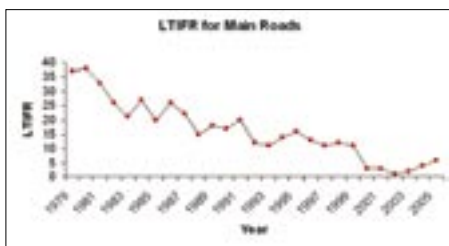
The corporate executive and the corporate OSH committee monitored everything that is going on against the organisation's safety plan.

While Main Roads' main activities were now largely carried out by contractors and the corporation still had a number of field workers, most staff now had desk-bound jobs.

It was, therefore, tempting to assume that nothing would happen

"But, it is amazing what does happen with people falling off chairs and things like that!"

Phil Ladner said that Main Roads was focussing on improving the safety consciousness across every workplace in the corporation.



# Confronting conflict

## The hazardous profession of policing

Having to deal with the most violent and dangerous members of the community means that the likelihood of assault, injury or death is substantially higher for police officers than other workers.

The violent confrontation between rioters and police at Sydney's Cronulla Beach in December illustrates some of the occupational hazards faced by today's modern police force.

Thousands of police officers are assaulted in Australia each year and the most recent statistics suggest that the death rate for Australian police is 11.3 per 100,000 persons per year – more than double that of the entire working population.

Research by criminologists suggests that one in every ten police officers is assaulted each year, mainly with fists, bottles, body fluids or syringes.

Until now, domestic disputes have accounted for most instances of violence against police but alcohol is frequently cited as a major contributory factor.

Although the dangers to police are usually seen as physical risk, new research suggests that psychosocial issues contribute a significant burden to the occupational health of police in Australia.

A prominent researcher, Dr Derek Smith, has carried out an extensive and in-depth analysis of psychosocial OSH issues in contemporary police work with a particular focus on the situation in Australia.

Dr Smith has a research grant at the Department of Hazard Assessment at the National Institute of Industrial Health in Japan.

Writing in the *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety*, he emphasises that law enforcement is a high stress occupation, when compared with other



*Police & Rioters at Cronulla, Dec. 2005*

jobs, and involves a wide range of physically arduous activities.

Although police officers are regularly exposed to the most violent, untrustworthy and antisocial members of society, they are nevertheless required to exercise discretion and control at all times.

Dr Smith says that the regular exposure to terrible events beyond the range of normal human experiences contributes a great deal to police stress.

He quotes a US survey as revealing that over the course of a career, the average police officer encounters:

- 25 recently dead bodies;
- 14 decaying bodies; and
- 10 sexually assaulted children.

The officer is also likely to experience colleagues being badly injured at least twice and being shot at, at least once.

According to Dr Smith's research, one of the important consequences of long-term exposure to police stress is burnout, which he describes as "a collection of negative psychological experiences that result from prolonged

exposure to occupational stress". It manifests as three key symptoms: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment.

"Burnout can also manifest as a cynical, negative and callous attitude towards members of the public."

Dr Smith says that lifestyle factors are an important risk factor for police and says that

US research shows that police may abuse alcohol at twice the rate of the general population but says that Australian studies have shown conflicting results. One of these suggests that half of those surveyed consumed excessive alcohol, a quarter were smokers, half believed they were overweight and less than a quarter did not do any regular exercise.

The investigation also said that almost one in every three male officers was a binge drinker.

Yet another telephone survey shows that police smoke at about the same rate as everyone else and well over half undertake regular and vigorous exercise.

Nevertheless, Dr Smith says it is clear that in some instances, alcohol may be the primary method used to deal with workplace stress and that although there appears to be a shift away from alcohol-based stress reduction activities in recent years, a strong tradition of drinking still remains within many police forces

He also points to other new risks such as needle-stick injuries and the setting up of clandestine drug laboratories as adding to the burden of police occupational health in recent years.

## Jail for attack on safety inspector

A builder in the UK has spent four months in jail for assaulting a safety inspector who had asked him to move from a dangerous working position on scaffolding five metres above the pavement. Eric Dawson of Hartlepool in northern England was found guilty of common assault and criminal damage.

The court was told that Mr Dawson

had not taken any measures to prevent himself, or his tools, from falling onto members of the public walking below.

When challenged, Mr Dawson grabbed the inspector by his shirt and ripped it, repeatedly punching the inspector in the face and chest, pinning him up against a wall, inflicting bruises and damaging a neck muscle.



# Embracing existing workplace culture

## Dangers of imposing uniformity

Continuing the series of safety reflections by present and former IFAP board members.

Each individual workplace within an organisation needs to find its own best solution to embracing effective OSH practices.

That's the view of one of Australia's leading safety communication specialists, Dr David Leith.

Dr Leith, who heads the communications team at WA's Public Transport Authority, has successfully completed a doctorate on workplace culture and communication as they affect safety.

He says that his PhD studies gave him an extraordinary insight into how the coalface of safety looks and is experienced by the workers themselves.

On many occasions, management imposes overall OSH changes to the entire workforce whereas Dr Leith's research shows that in large organisations there are benefits in preserving the unique qualities of individual work groups.

"The theme of the 90's of a strong and unified culture may run counter to the aim of having a high safety outcome", he says.

Dr Leith believes that there is always a gulf in understanding between both the management and board table of a large corporation and those who are employed at the work site where the dangers exist on a daily basis.

"The CEO is not going to suffer too many hazards sitting at his desk, the real hazard lies at the coalface!" He says it is important for management to acknowledge the high significance of the local workforce culture.

The research by Dr Leith demonstrates that there is a benefit in preserving the unique qualities of individual work groups within a large organisation. It can be counter-productive to make their cultures all the same by imposing uniformity.

For his PhD, Dr Leith spent a key part of his time as a member of a workgroup

or "crew" inside a large industrial processing plant which employs 1500 workers. He took part in 12-hour shifts, observing and participating as well as gaining the acceptance of other workers.

This provided a good insight into the issues being faced by the employees and their relationship with management.



David Leith

It quickly became apparent that this relationship depended very much on the supervision qualities of the individual managers.

For David Leith, it confirmed that within its own safety culture any work group has a tremendous wealth of opportunity to work more safely.

"They understand their job pretty well, they know about where the hazards lie and they have the wherewithal to create their own improved safety performance."

David Leith says that in its desire to achieve a safe workplace, management often wants to change that culture by changing from the top.

But he counsels organisations to think more about engaging the existing culture before imposing overall organisational change.

"Work cultures are very intense things with groups of workers usually having a very strong set of entrenched ideas and ideals which are difficult to shift. To make major change can take a long time so it is best to work with what you've got and intensify it rather than to impose the ideas of an 'alien' senior management group."

In addition, those in senior management are often the products of private schools as well as being university-educated and tend to live on the 'right' side of town.

With all the goodwill they possess they don't have the same awareness as those at the coalface and are unlikely to understand the deep motivations of their workers.

David Leith spent 10 years as editor of IFAP's SafetyWA magazine, which he describes as a high point of his career.

During this time he became aware of the enormous range of approaches taken by managers to achieve good safety outcomes.

"They are not only fulfilling all of the statutory requirements, but are also approaching safety with creativity and ingenuity."

Looking ahead, David believes it is essential for safety managers and safety practitioners to reach a level of seniority so that they can routinely influence the way an organisation operates.

But he stresses that each workplace needs to find its own best solution and says that the annual SafetyWA conferences demonstrate the number of new and novel approaches that can be taken to effectively ensure safe workplaces.

At the Public Transport Authority, Dr Leith has initiated a research study into the assaults against transit guards on Perth's metropolitan rail network (see SafetyWA Jan 2005).

Ironically, when he is off duty, David Leith often pursues his hazardous hobby of para-gliding, a pastime in which people have either been seriously injured, or even killed.

However, over a period of 25 years, he has suffered only a few minor knocks and bruises.

"If you treat safety as the prime thought in your mind when doing something hazardous, it can be safe", he says.

# OSH efforts recognised

## Aged care group wins gold award

The culture of safety must be imbedded across an entire organisation if it is to be effective.

That's the view of Vaughan Harding, executive director of Uniting Church Homes (UCH), which was a winner of a Gold Safe Way Achiever Award in the 2005 IFAP/CGU Safe Way Awards.

The organisation is one of Western Australia's most prominent aged care providers and employs 1100 staff scattered over more than 20 locations.

Vaughan Harding sees the award as great recognition for UCH, but expresses his disappointment that no other organisation in the health and related industries had put itself forward to be recognised.

"Given that collectively we are a very large employer of labour in Western Australia, it's disappointing that we don't have other aged care providers vying for these awards or at a standard where they can achieve one", he says.

Vaughan Harding compares the risk of injury in the industry as being similar to that in mining and says that OSH should be a critical focus in both sectors.

He says mining has addressed safety as a number one priority, but so far aged care, across the board, has not done so.

"Our sector is not about producing a product, it is about looking after the health, wellbeing and lifestyle of people. It is a demanding sector to work in where staff are often being pulled in many directions at once."

He describes it as a complex sector with many activities that occur every hour that have the potential for danger.

The Manager, Injury Risk Management Services, Jackie Madeley, told SafetyWA that one of the main OSH areas focused on by Uniting Church Homes is manual handling by nurses and carers.

There have been substantial changes in OSH legislation from the days when trainee nursing staff were only told to make sure to bend their knees before doing any lifting. Many nurses from that era are now suffering from back injuries that, in some instances, have forced them from the workforce. Others will suffer pain from such injuries for the rest of their lives.



UCH staff being trained

Research suggests that the initial capital outlays involved in purchasing and upgrading equipment for lifting residents is more than outweighed by a drop in the costs incurred from injuries that have resulted from poor equipment or poor work practices.

Jackie Madeley says Uniting Church homes made a determined decision to put the lifting system at each of its residences personally under the control of the carers at each site.

Even though there is a high staff turnover throughout the industry, UCH ensures that every new employee is thoroughly trained in the use of the lifting device. "They are trained in no-lift techniques, right from the start", she says.

## The hidden imposition: absenteeism

By Darren Thomas, CGU Safety & Risk Services State Manager WA, NT & Tasmania

The actual cost of injury and illness to industry, companies and the community is far greater than merely the cost of compensation. One of the hidden costs is absenteeism.

Usually human resources (HR) departments manage the process of absenteeism. But, when managing absenteeism, there is more than passing link to occupational safety and health and employee well-being.

Absenteeism costs Australian industry \$7-billion (or 2% of GDP) per annum in lost productivity. Fifty percent of employees admit to taking a "sickie" and up to 70% of lost work time is due to illness. Yet, very little advice regarding physical and mental health is provided to employees.

An organisation with high absenteeism is more than likely to be having safety, productivity and industrial relations problems, but we attempt to manage these issues separately.

A more holistic approach to an

employee's health and well being, beyond the machine guard and lock out tag out, will assist in the prevention of absenteeism. The challenge is to have the entire organisation embracing this philosophy.

The manager who imposes the wearing of protective safety goggles to prevent eye injuries at work, then denies an employee's request to borrow or even buy (from the company) a pair to mow the lawns at home, is not living the message.

Is this person's eye sight more important at work than it is at home? An eye injury can incur the same result, no matter where the incident. Absenteeism is a far greater cost than a pair of goggles, which more than likely will be returned with interest.

To improve a management system, we must be able to gather data and measure and report results. An integrated HR/IR and OSH system will facilitate the process, stemming from which is a commitment to improve.

Employees who perceive a lack of commitment to their health and well being (both at work and in general) are far more likely to be less productive.

Employee assistance programs, wellness programs and internal seminars are an excellent means in which to convey messages. A more powerful approach is to have everyone believing and living the holistic wellness program, and committing to each other's physical and mental health (which is associated with stress).

Educated in the art of prevention, OSH professionals thinking laterally will be able to apply theoretical and practical skills to this burgeoning problem for business.

We often speak of culture, behavioural safety and wellness but are less likely to apply them to the problem of absenteeism. It is time we did!



Darren Thomas

# Violence Against WA Teachers

Continued from front page

An employee assistance program provides confidential counselling for employees and their families on both work and non-related work issues. The department also has a strategy which it hopes will “nip in the bud” the problems of classroom aggression.

Graeme Jones says the department has a new program involving the locating of a senior police officer in the department’s central office to advise and support school staff.

“We are training our staff so that they are more aware of the issues and how to deal with any instances of violent behaviour”, he said.

While Graeme Jones was keen to stress that statistics show no obvious increase in the number of assaults against school teachers in recent years, the department recognises it as a significant problem and has introduced regular training programs for school principals in violence prevention strategies.

Nevertheless, stress-related payouts are reported to have contributed to 20 per cent of all workers’ compensation payments made by the Department of Education over the last two financial years.

Mike Kelly believes it will gradually become increasingly difficult to attract teachers to schools with aggressive students. He says the vast majority of children from socially disadvantaged areas attend public schools.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION PAYOUTS		
Assaults	\$ 94,887	(13)
Traumatic events	\$ 88,470	(16)
Workplace violence	\$ 383,479	(54)
Harassment	\$ 357,940	(26)
Excessive work pressure	\$ 1,320,000	(132)

Figures published last November show that during the years 2003/4 and 2004/5 a total of more than three-million dollars was paid in workers’ compensation to Education Department staff.

The playground too is a compensation zone. During the past two financial years, the Education Department paid out nearly \$100,000 in damages to students and teachers who have sustained injuries at school.

These included compensation for a lost finger, chipped teeth, broken arms, legs and collar bones.

# Book Review

by Martin Ralph

## Handling Death and Bereavement at Work

Author: David Charles-Edwards

ISBN: 0-415-34724-6

From the very first page, it is apparent that this a special book on several fronts. It opens with a photograph of a Scottish headstone with an inscription of the names and dates of the deaths of eight members of the Whyte family.

The striking point from the photograph is that Betsy Ferguson, wife and mother, lost her 21-year-old son Dugald in action on December 16, 1915. Her husband Donald and 17-year-old son Daniel were drowned two weeks later on New Year’s Day 1916, and her 20-year-old son, Walter, was killed in action on the 18 August, 1916.

I was confronted by mixed emotions to Betsy’s losses, challenged as to how I would react in similar circumstances, and intrigued to learn more about a subject that would appear to be anathema to the majority of safety and health practitioners.

Delving deeper into the book, its special features become more evident. The author is an experienced counsellor, whose first wife, Janet, died when she was aged 27. The book contains a host of excellent case studies, drawn from the very real reflections of many people, and which benefit from the empathic approach of the author.

Despite a highly charged opening, this book is technically well crafted, and contains numerous references, interspersed with the case studies and quotations from others who have observed the bereavement process. Importantly, the author refrains from entering into a religious (or for that matter, a non-religious) discussion on death, opting to focus on the observable aspects of dying and its impact upon others.

The first section discusses loss and bereavement and draws a comparison between the loss of a work colleague through death and through dismissal or redundancy, and covers many of the aspects of the grieving process. This section also deals with emotionally charged

issues including the loss of children, the process of saying goodbye and the importance of bereavement counselling.

The second section covers the issue of ‘facing death’ and canvasses topics such as the socially taboo subject of death, the emotional response to dying, and importantly for the practitioner, suicide, stress and bullying. The author also lends some suggestions as to how to identify someone who is at risk of suicide, and offers recommendations on how to assist vulnerable persons. This is a very important component of the publication, and by itself is worthy of the purchase.

Section Three deals with community aspects of death and bereavement, while Section 4 looks specifically at managing death in the workplace (whether or not the death occurs in the actual workplace). It contains suggestions on how the organisation can (and should) respond, the assistance that can be provided, the importance of organisational mourning, and the process of formally responding (via investigation, communication etc) to a fatality in the workplace.

The book concludes with four more detailed case studies, coupled with a series of checklists to aid managers and others in the workplace with the bereavement process. These provide a very useful platform for establishing a workplace policy or assisting in managing the response to the death of a colleague.

*This is a powerful book, perhaps best summarised in the words of the author of the foreword: “This book provides a crutch for all of us who want to help, but don’t know the ‘right’ way to do it. The author’s cogent and detailed descriptions of the underlying patterns associated with bereavement at work are dealt with in an accessible language and contain vivid accounts of real life experiences. It is a practical guide for what has been for too long a taboo subject.”*