



Speech by

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WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (11.30 a.m.): The incidence of injury and death in the workplace is a shameful record, with statistics in Australia far higher than many Western countries. For a breadwinner to go off to work in the morning never to return or to suffer an accident which renders them unable to work for the rest of their life is an absolute tragedy. It often means a family is impoverished and a once proud worker left devastated with feelings of inadequacy, frustration, possibly severe pain and the contemplation of suicide. It may lead to marriage breakdown. I have seen all too many men and women reduced to a life of suffering and unable to supply the basic needs for their family. There have been times when a young person with their whole life ahead of them has suffered a terrible accident which leaves them facing a very bleak future. The economic cost to our country and industry is also huge.

For too many years governments have failed to respond to the need for reform in the workplace. I am immensely proud to be part of a government which has accepted its responsibilities to workers and employers to bring before this House legislation which is well balanced and places responsibility on employers, supervisors, workers, manufacturers, designers and suppliers. In fact, workplace health and safety should be the prerogative of all of us. If we perceive a practice or piece of equipment or building to be unsafe, we should report it to a higher authority. The workplace can be a very hazardous place. I am glad to see partnerships in the workplace where consultation happens between employers and employees where the focus is on prevention and minimising risks. It is important to note that protection is offered to workers who bring unsafe practices to the attention of safety officers or employers. Unfortunately, there have been too many instances of employers willing to cut corners and for the sake of profit allow the safety of their employees to be at risk. In the past many have felt intimidated and unable to speak out.

In recent years improvements to health and safety practices have seen a reduction of accidents and illness in the workplace. These measures will ensure that our safety record continues to improve. Workplaces are changing. Our world is a very dynamic place and we as legislators must keep abreast of current practices. Many unsafe practices can be eliminated by education and training. The bill enhances previous practices by requiring that workplace health and safety officers conduct annual inspections of the workplace as well as accredited training for workplace health and safety representatives. Every workplace is a potential hazard. However, the legislation does not cover residential properties.

This legislation brings workplace health and safety into line with previous legislation governing electrical safety and the management of dangerous goods. We as a community need to remember that we are all responsible for the safety of those in our own working environment. I well remember a case where a supervisor had an exit sign fall, breaking the bridge of her nose. She suffered terribly. Following several operations, constant migraine headaches, strains on her marriage and family life as well as economic pressures from her loss of income, a court hearing was pending. Whose responsibility was it? Perhaps the builder, the electrician who installed it, the manufacturer of the sign, the maintenance man who last replaced the bulb inside the sign or even a faulty screw. There are many reasons why accidents occur. I would like to think that each one of us would accept our own responsibility and that similarly our community as a whole would adopt a vigilance and care for the wellbeing of others. I commend our minister and his staff for once again producing protective legislation to ensure more of our workers have safe environments in which to work.