

## **Question on Notice**

**No. 244**

**Asked on 28 April 2004**

MR WELLINGTON asked the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations (MR BARTON)—

### **QUESTION:**

With reference to the Queensland Workplace Health and Safety Strategy 2004-12 tabled in State Parliament on 27 April 2004, in which he referred to the “Estimated cost to the Queensland community of work related injury and illness at more than \$5 billion and claim around 100 lives”—

What component of this cost is attributed to workers suffering from or being diagnosed with multiple chemical sensitivity injury or illness and how was this cost calculated?

### **ANSWER:**

In 1995 the then Industry Commission (now Productivity Commission) reported that in Australia, approximately 500 workers suffer a traumatic death, 2,200 die of work-related cancers, up to 650,000 are injured or become ill and the total cost to the Australian economy is \$20.2 billion. In 2003, this was estimated to have increased to \$30 billion per annum.

This equates to some 15 cases of serious injury occurring every hour, seven deaths per day and a cost equivalent to approximately 5 percent of Australia’s GDP. These figures do not include the more insidious forms of disease whose cause is less easily traced to industrial processes but which, nevertheless, may well be associated with the workplace.

In addition, at any one time, approximately 200,000 people cannot work due to an injury or disease sustained from work, while another 270,000 have been forced to change their jobs or permanently reduce their hours of work for the same reason.

Queensland’s proportion of this equates to approximately 100 work-related deaths per year at a cost of around \$5 billion.

The total estimated cost of workplace injuries is a global estimate and cannot be broken down into particular categories of injuries.

The total cost of workplace injury and illness is difficult to measure with any precision. While the direct cost in terms of workers’ compensation payments can be measured, the indirect costs cannot be measured with any accuracy.

Indirect costs include reductions in lifetime earnings by employees, the costs to industry of employee turnover, lost production and the costs to the community of care and treatment of injured workers not met by workers' compensation. These costs are estimated to be many times larger than the direct cost. Various studies have placed it at anywhere between 3:1 and 8:1.

The overwhelming majority opinion within the medical community is that multiple chemical sensitivity, in which multiple symptoms result from low-level exposure to chemicals at levels that are considered safe, is not able to be diagnosed.