

Workshop meets mishap with tighter management

When ASI-member, Quality Assured Bolt and Steel Fabrication (QABSF) faced possible court action over an alleged breach of workplace safety responsibilities involving an injured staff member, the company took the option of reforming its safeworking policies and practices top to bottom in consultation with Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ).

In January 2007, the employee of 18 months' service was operating a metal lathe when part of his clothing became entangled in the slowly rotating chuck of the machine from which he sustained multiple fracture injuries and lacerations to his left shoulder and arm.

The employee required surgery and underwent comprehensive rehabilitation from the injuries, the impact of which resonated significantly throughout the workplace and to the employee's family.

WHSQ investigators followed up immediately and after a thorough investigation, alleged that QABSF had contravened provisions of the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 by exposing their worker to risks and that the worker suffered injuries that amounted to Grievous Bodily Harm.

Although QABSF had some basic safe operating procedures in place and staff were trained and considered competent, management knew that there needed to be a more comprehensive examination of the way they approach risk on the shopfloor.

Accordingly, it explored the option of entering into an enforceable undertaking (EU) with the Department of Justice as an alternative to having the matter dealt with through the court system and the EU was subsequently negotiated with WHSQ.

Although costs associated with delivering on the terms of an undertaking are much greater than any likely court imposed penalty, it allowed QABSF to enact significant and systemic organisational reforms including an occupational health and safety management system consistent with AS/NZ 4804 – *Occupational health and safety management systems – General guidelines on principles, systems and supporting techniques*.

The EU also requires the employer to identify and implement measures that will deliver tangible benefits to workers, industry generally and the community.

QABSF staff attended a safety workshop and first aid training and they have all been issued with new uniforms that are not 'loose fitting'. A video highlighting the dangers of machinery with rotating parts and the need to control risks is also being developed under the terms of the commitment spanning several years.

Since the EU was accepted by WHSQ, the business has also implemented risk assessments and induction training using SafeWork Instructions (SWIs) for the activities that workers perform and Safe Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the plant and equipment the workers operate.

The WHSQ closely monitors the company's compliance with the terms of the agreed undertaking.

According to the WHSQ, QABSF is now an engineering company that is aware of how easily injuries can occur and the importance of having in place policies, procedures, training and safe systems of work to ensure workers can go home to their families each day in a safe and healthy condition. It has learned a valuable lesson from a tragic event that should never have happened.

QABSF is a small family-owned and operated bolt and steel fabrication business based at Narangba, north of Brisbane. The primary work undertaken by the business is the manufacture of high quality bolts and fabricated steel structures used in the construction and maintenance of bridges. In the workshop there are a number of metal fabrication machines such as lathes, milling machines and drill presses.

Seminars to explore managers' and directors' exposure

The ASI in conjunction with the Australian Government's *EnterpriseConnect* program are conducting a national series of seminars on responsibilities of Company Directors and Managers in relation to the Corporations Act, Competition and Consumers Act 2010, Workplace Health and Safety statutes and other relevant legislation that may affect employers and business owners.

Newcastle (Wednesday, 30 March)

Melbourne (Tuesday, 5 April)

Adelaide (Wednesday, 6 April)

Sydney (Wednesday, 6 April)

Brisbane (Thursday, 7 April)

Perth (Tuesday, 12 April)

For further details or to book:

Tel: 02 9931 6666 or Email: registrations@steel.org.au.

