

Safety training compliance challenges

The Formwork Industry Association's Michael Sugg explores the difficulties faced by formworkers in meeting the training mandates set forth by the Work Health and Safety Act and proposes potential solutions to bridge the gap.

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Formworkers play a crucial role in the construction industry, being involved in shaping the foundations and structures of various projects. However, compliance with the safety training requirements outlined in the Work Health and Safety (WHS) Act can be a challenging aspect for these skilled workers.

Challenges faced by formworkers

1. Lack of accessible training programs

One of the primary hurdles faced by formworkers is the limited availability of accessible training programs that cater specifically to their needs. As their responsibilities and tasks may differ from other construction roles, formworkers often require specialised training, which is not always readily available.

2. Cost barriers

Completing training courses can be expensive, and this financial burden is a significant challenge for many formworkers, especially those working in smaller construction firms or as independent contractors. The cost of training, along with potential time off work, can create barriers to compliance.

3. Time constraints

Formworkers often work in demanding environments with tight project schedules. Finding time to attend training sessions can be problematic, and employers may face difficulties releasing workers for training without affecting project timelines.

4. Language and literacy barriers

For some formworkers, English may not be their first language, and they may encounter difficulties in understanding complex training materials, assessments, and instructions. This language barrier can hinder effective learning and comprehension.

5. Limited recognition of prior experience

Experienced formworkers who have been in the industry for years may find it frustrating that their practical knowledge and skills are not adequately recognised for training compliance. Some training programs may not offer suitable avenues to assess and credit their existing expertise.

Proposed solutions

The recently released Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2023-2033 states that construction companies need to make sure that, on their projects, there is 'meaningful and relevant training for workers, delivered in a way they can understand'.

It supports the continuation and strong focus on compliance and enforcement by regulators, with a particular focus on systematic WHS management. If you don't have meaningful and relevant training and cannot demonstrate robust WHS management, the risk is that the safety regulators will investigate the quality of your systems, including training and competency, to hold companies and individuals accountable.

WHS laws are risk based and don't need an incident to occur for a business and its individuals to be liable. It is every employer's responsibility to make sure their workers get the training, instruction and support they need to keep them safe at work.

The Formwork Industry Association (FIA), in conjunction with its members, has developed a new education and skills pathway to overcome the challenges faced by formworkers. Addressing compliance issues, the initial *Safe Formworker Program* has been designed to provide the following features to ensure construction, civil and formwork companies can comply with their obligations.

1. Tailored training programs

The *Safe Formworker Program* is a specialised WHS training program exclusively for formworkers that addresses their specific needs and challenges. The program covers essential safety protocols, techniques and technologies relevant to their roles. By addressing the unique needs of formworkers, this specialised training is more relevant and effective in enhancing competency and safety.

2. Government subsidies and support

To alleviate the financial burden, the FIA has secured funding from the NSW Government to provide 1,000 free places for formworkers' training and access to the program and app.



3. Flexible training delivery

Offering flexible training options, the program is delivered via a modern mobile learning experience. It enables formworkers to complete their training without significant disruptions to their work schedules, by providing bite-sized mobile courses that can be completed in the shed during toolbox talks. The program also enables employers to support a learning culture that allows workers to upskill during quieter periods.

4. Multilingual training materials

The *Safe Formworker Program* has been translated into Arabic and can also be translated into other languages. This provides training materials in multiple languages to improve accessibility and understanding for non-native English-speaking formworkers. This approach will enhance the learning experience and overall training compliance.

5. Recognition of prior learning

Creating formal recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes will allow experienced formworkers to demonstrate their skills and

knowledge, gaining credit for their existing expertise toward training compliance. Our new education and skills pathway for formwork will enable these RPL programs to be successful and the app has certain features that allow workers to provide on the job video of their skills.

6. Industry endorsement

The *Safe Formworker Program* is endorsed by a growing number of construction companies that have specifically named the program as an essential compliance requirement in their tender process.

Complying with the training requirements identified in the WHS Act is essential for the safety and wellbeing of formworkers and those working alongside them. By implementing the *Safe Formworker Program*, we can bridge the training compliance gap, ensuring that formworkers receive the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their duties safely and efficiently. Collaboration between governments, industry stakeholders and training providers will be key to fostering a safer and more compliant construction industry. ■■

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