

# Industry takes the lead on safety

The formwork industry is taking the lead and has secured funding to improve formwork safety on construction sites, with a focus on education, innovation and collaboration as critical enablers of success.

The *SafeWork Australia Work Health and Safety (WHS) Strategy 2023-2033* report, which was released in late February, is a national WHS strategy agreed to by all states and territories aimed at reducing workplace fatalities, injuries, and illnesses. It sets a national vision of safe and healthy work for all, providing a platform for delivering key WHS improvements.

The Formwork Industry Association (FIA) supports this strategy and looks forward over the next decade to continuing its commitment to healthier, safer workplaces.

This strategy notes that while fatality and injury rates have generally fallen over the last decade, the progress has slowed. It states, "education, innovation and collaboration will be critical enablers of success" – something the FIA has been advocating and actioning for the past few years.

According to the strategy, construction continues to have one of the highest rates of fatalities and serious injuries and has one of the highest frequencies of serious claims per million hours worked.

FIA Chief Executive Officer Michael Sugg says if the competency of individual workers increases, improvements in safety, productivity, and quality will follow. "This has led us to look at long-term solutions to current industry issues," says Sugg. "There is a need for the Australian formwork industry to build its own education and skills pathway."

"We need a new education and skills pathway to improved safety and better buildings, towards a relevant formwork qualification that includes new recognition of prior learning processes.

"We need a new industry recognised accreditation scheme and micro credential learning and verification of competency processes that build on a worker's skills and capabilities."

This is a pathway to accredited training, but one that needs urgent steps to re-engage the learner and enable accessible education for formworkers.

Sugg says we must remember that these workers often left school and education at an early age, that there is no need (at present) for them to attain any qualification to work on-site (other than a White Card), and there are no incentives for workers to upskill or improve

their competencies, or for their employers to assist.

On top of this, access to training is difficult, lengthy, inflexible, and unresponsive to industry needs and the processes for keeping track of workers' training, competency, skills and qualifications are often costly and both time and labour-intensive.

With an ageing workforce and a future skilled labour shortage, the industry must act now to build a secure and safe future for itself and its workers.

"A key factor in improving industry safety, quality and productivity is to lift the competency of its workers," says Sugg. "As a start, we need to re-engage the formworker in learning, build their confidence and pride and provide incentives for learning before we can ensure there is a demand for certified training provided by the Departments of Education and funded by the government."

FIA President Jason Andrijic says that over the past two years, the Association Board has been working with industry to develop this pathway.

"Stage One proposes the re-engagement of workers in learning, focusing on WHS issues to improve safety and a pathway to certified training," says Andrijic. "We are pleased to announce, with the support of the NSW Department of Education, that we can launch the first part of our pathway, the *Safe Formworker Program*."

## What is the Safe Formworker Program and how do workers access it?

Developed in consultation with the formwork industry, this program is a pathway for workers to receive micro credential learning on formwork-specific WHS issues to increase awareness of formwork safety.

Delivered via a modern mobile learning experience, the *Safe Formworker Program* offers bite-sized mobile courses that teams can actually enjoy, complete with gamification and real rewards built-in.

With video and image-based learning, along with gamification, it is hoped the program will re-engage workers in learning, tackle language barriers and prepare workers for further learning. It will cover the important aspects of formwork WHS issues and improving formwork safety awareness on site

## Formwork education and skills pathway

to improved safety in the Australian Formwork industry

### Safe Formwork Program

Micro credential learning that re engages the worker in learning and builds awareness of Formwork specific WHS issues

### Microcredential courses

A selection of courses designed to build learning confidence and assess the workers knowledge and competencies.

### Formwork Skills

A selection of specific courses teaching skills that can be assessed on site via video uploads. Building a body of evidence of formwork specific skills for RPL.

### Formwork Skill Set A

Entry level Accredited training on specific units of competency relating to Formwork



so that workers can return home safely at the end of the working day.

More than just a training course, access provides not only education on specific formwork skills and positive awareness of the industry risks, but it also provides each worker with their own individual access for one year, refresher courses, access to additional courses, a place to store their licences, White Card and any other training certificates – making everyone's life a lot easier.

Feedback from a recent pilot program was exceptional with one head of safety saying: "I have been in the formwork industry for 20 years and have not come across training like this, which is easy to understand and complete, and relevant to the work I do."

The program includes five courses and 13 lessons and can be viewed on the FIA web site. Each lesson takes only five minutes or less and can be delivered in toolbox talks or on rain affected days in the shed.

FIA Vice-President Stefano Calautti says that when the program was rolled out during toolbox talks on site, where workers were able to access the program easily via their mobile phones, he found that the change in atmosphere and attention given by workers was incredible.

"All workers were fully engaged in the learning, and the gamification aspect of the lessons delivered engagement in the room, with workers sharing their phones and scores with one another," says Calautti. "Worker's feedback included comments that it was 'easy to use', 'relevant to my work', and 'it makes me feel safer that my workmates are doing the course as well.'"

After a successful pilot program and confirmed industry support from both construction and formwork companies, the FIA is pleased to announce that the NSW Government, through the Department of Education, has agreed to fund the placement of 1,000 workers through the program in the coming months.

Michael Sugg is currently presenting the program to various construction and formwork companies and discussing how it

can be implemented on various projects. "This is quite a task, and we are extremely grateful for the department's support," he says.

"With contractual requirements on every government infrastructure project and learning targets and quotas, the program enables companies to report easily on statistics and overcome the 'tick box' mentality to training that currently exists."

The *SafeWork Australia WHS Strategy 2023-2033* report states that achieving reduced worker injuries, illnesses, and fatalities requires embedding good WHS practices, innovating and deepening knowledge of WHS risks to broaden understanding of workers. It states that collaborating consistently to respond to WHS challenges is critical, something the FIA *Safe Formworker Program* certainly achieves.

It also states that companies need to make sure that during projects, there is meaningful, relevant and comprehensible training for workers. It supports the continuation and strong focus on compliance and enforcement by regulators, with a particular focus on systematic WHS management.

Jason Andrijic is very positive about the new formwork education and skills pathway, which is getting off to a good start with the *Safe Formworker Program*. "The feedback and responses have been very promising and with 100 workers already through the program, I am sure we can hit our targets," he says.

Re-engaging workers in learning and covering important WHS aspects is a priority of the program, and, from early reports, it looks like 'education, innovation and industry collaboration' will be critical enablers in the success of the *SafeWork Australia WHS Strategy* and improvements in safety awareness on site in the formwork industry. FIA Chief Executive Officer Michael Sugg says, "As a result, we all firmly believe we will see not only improved safety, but productivity and quality on projects."

Details of the program can be found on the FIA web site and safety managers are encouraged to contact Michael Sugg to discuss how to achieve the target of 1,000 workers through the program to improve site safety. |||

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