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INCREASING ATTENTION ON OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH

As evidence of the Government's dedication to occupational safety and health, Minister Kobelke has recently advised that eight new inspectors would be introduced into WorkSafe during 2003/2004 and six more each year following for two years.

Particular attention will be focused on improving occupational safety and health within the construction and retail industry and increasing penalties for employers who blatantly continue to disregard their occupational safety and health duties of care.

There has also been a shift in the Courts to increase the penalties placed on companies and directors. In March 2002, the Courts confirmed that directors are liable to receive the same penalties as the offending company. In this landmark decision, a director was fined \$25,000 for the death of an employee who was killed in a workplace electrocution. Interestingly, this is the largest penalty that has been awarded against a Western Australian director (previous examples of fines imposed on Company Directors include fines in the amounts of \$7,000, \$5,000 and \$1,000).

In a society in which occupational safety and health risks are ever increasing, and in view of the recommendations made by Commissioner Laing in his review of the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984 (WA)*, occupational safety and health is becoming an area of increasing concern.

Given the tragic outcomes that can result from a failure to consider occupational safety and health risks and the increasing trend to impose stricter penalties on employers, it is clear that employers need to consider their occupational safety and health obligations, sooner rather than later.

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