

Branch Newsletter June 2014



Inside this issue:

- 3. Gloves
- 3. Your subs tax deduction
- 4. WHS Items of interest
- 4. What are your rights if you develop skin cancer from your job?
- 5. Slater and Gordon proud Partner with Aviation Branch
- 6. Organiser Vacancies
- 7. Your Union Benefits Update
- 7. Super News
- 9. BCOM Delegates and Organisers

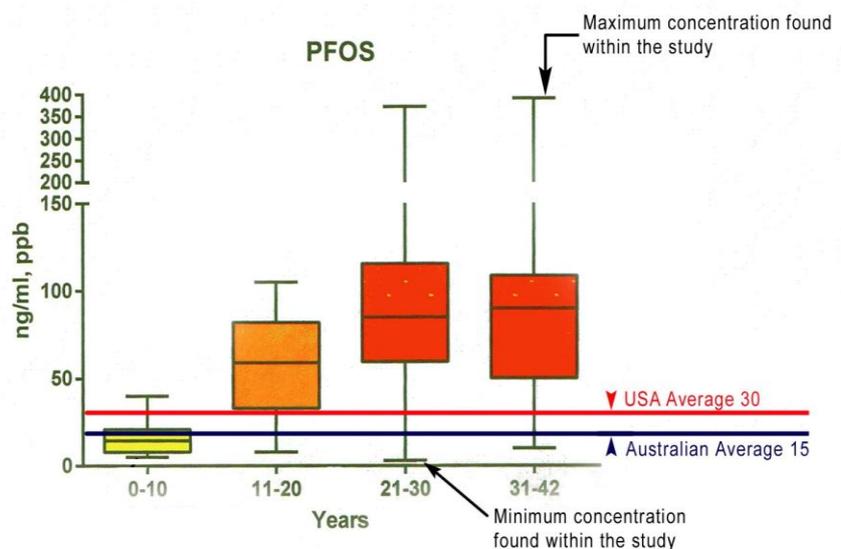
The results are in, which begs the question: Do PFOS and PFOA pose a risk to my health and wellbeing?

Wes Garrett, National WHS Coordinator, UFUA Aviation Branch

As members should be aware, last year Airservices engaged the University of Queensland to conduct a study to evaluate workplace exposure to perfluoroalkyl acids (PFOS, PFHxS & PFOA). If you chose to participate in the study you most likely would have received your personal results over the last week or so. A brief summary of the results are listed below:

- “Higher levels of PFOS and PFHxS were found in the serum of ARFF staff compared to the general Australian and US population.
- Higher levels of PFOS and PFHxS were found in those who had been employed in jobs with foam contact for a longer period of time”. (The University of Queensland, 2014)

The diagram below which was provided by the University, highlights the level of PFOS bioaccumulation within staff based on years of service. Note the y-axis changes scale at 150ng/ml, ppb.



(The University of Queensland 2014)

Now that the study has been completed it is clear that, on average, members who have served ARFF for 10 or more years have, over that time, accumulated fluorosurfactants within their bodies that are well above the normal range. If you are a member who falls into this category, it is important that you follow the advice given in the letter you received which is: "If these levels are outside of the normal range then it is recommended that you take your letter to your personal health professional to discuss this further". It has come to the attention of your union that a member has already followed this advice and was referred on by his GP "who thought they warranted further investigation and directed him to a specialist to investigate these results immediately".

Below I have provided some information taken directly from the World Health Organisation's (WHO) web page relating to PFOS and human health.

"After the announcement of 3M in May 2000 that it would phase-out the use of PFOS voluntarily from 2001 onwards, several OECD countries agreed to informally work together to collect information on the physico-chemical and toxic properties of PFOS for the purpose of conducting a hazard assessment. The UK and the US agreed to take the lead. This hazard assessment concluded that the presence and persistence of PFOS in the environment, combined with its toxicity and bioaccumulation potential indicated a cause for concern to the environment and human health". (OECD, 2007)

As noted above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) drafted a hazard assessment report focused on fluorosurfactants. One of the chapters in this document centres on the hazards posed to human health based on occupational exposure to PFOS and PFOA. The report contains the results of a mortality study undertaken on employees of the 3M plant in Decatur, Alabama where PFOS has been manufactured since 1991, and PFOA since 1998. One of the aims of the study was to determine whether plant employees had significantly different causes of death than that of the general population. As is the case with all human health studies conducted on this subject to date, the cohort was relatively small, consisting of just 2083 employees of whom 147 had passed away. The following observation was made:

"Workers who were employed in high exposure jobs were 13 times more likely to die of bladder cancer than the general population of Alabama (SMR = 12.77, 95% CI = 2.63 - 37.35). This effect remained when the data were analysed using county death rates. Three male employees in the cohort died of bladder cancer (0.12 expected). All of these workers had been employed at the Decatur plant for more than 20 years, and all of them had worked in high exposure jobs for at least 5 years (SMR = 24.49). The high ratio of observed bladder cancer deaths in long-time employees to those expected in the general population is troublesome". (OECD, 2002)

With that said and owing to the small size of the study it is important to note that the report also states: "The results of this study should only be used for hypothesis generation". (OECD, 2002)

To date, the majority of meaningful studies into the toxic effects of fluorosurfactants have been limited to animals, and it is true to say that the adverse effects experienced by the lab animals (monkeys, rats and mice) may not directly translate through to humans. What we do know is that health experts in OECD countries have found PFOS and PFOA to be persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic to the environment and humans. What we also know, is that due to the recent amendment to the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act (Presumptive Legislation), employees with 15 years of service who contract primary site bladder cancer will be entitled to a rebuttable presumption that the disease was caused through occupational exposure. All members,

regardless of years of service, are asked to retain the results of this study should there be grounds for their use at some time in the future.

The Aviation Branch has received from a copy of the full report into the study from ASA. We will provide members with any developments as they come to hand.

AND REMEMBER as important as the rebuttable presumption provided by the Act is, actions to prevent these diseases manifesting in the first place, through selection and use of correct PPE, decontamination and hygiene protocols which are compliant with the highest standards, is an objective that demands significant effort from all.

Bibliography

OECD. 2002. *HAZARD ASSESSMENT OF PERFLUOROOCTANE SULFONATE (PFOS) AND ITS SALTS.* 2002. ENV/JM/RD(2002)17/FINAL.

—. **2007.** *REPORT OF AN OECD WORKSHOP ON PERFLUOROCARBOXYLIC ACIDS (PFCAs) AND PRECURSORS.* s.l. : OECD, 2007. ENV/JM/MONO(2007)11.

The University of Queensland. 2014. Notification of Blood Sampling Results. s.l. : National Research Centre for Environmental Toxicology (Entox), 2014. June.

Airservices have refused a request from your Union to provide access to testing/screening for all those employees who didn't participate in the study. The Union is not satisfied with this response and is obtaining further advice on this and other matters arising from the Entox report.

1. Gloves.

Concerns have been raised about a potential hazard with the loop on the Firetech 2 glove and were raised with the Manager Operations Support who has arranged for a risk assessment to be done.

The MOS has advised that

- the online Information package and quiz for the new gloves are live and have been for a week or so. The safety info in it should be getting out to the staff.
- PACFIRE has confirmed that the fitting has been mostly completed and that staff were trained at each location and they are sending an updated list of the staff trained shortly.
- Any staff member who feels they have an issue with sizing can see this person for a refit/resize and order another pair through the normal replacement of PPE, making sure PACFIRE updates the database with their new size info.
- PACFIRE currently have stock of the Super Mars Plus in the country and can supply ad hoc station orders on top of replacements.
- Firetech 2's should be here in approximately a fortnight.

If you have any issues with the new gloves please contact your BCOM Delegate or Organiser for assistance.

2. Your membership subscriptions are a tax deduction.

When completing your tax return don't forget that your Union subscriptions are an allowable tax deduction.

To assist you with claiming your deduction please contact the Union office and we will provide you with the amount of the subscriptions you paid for the year. At your request we can also provide you with a statement of subscriptions paid for the year.

3. WHS Items of interest.

Europe: Workplace chemicals database online The European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) and the Spanish Trade Union Institute ISTAS have developed the RISCTOX chemicals database. The risks from chemicals in the workplace are still poorly known. Yet a third of occupational disease claims recognized in Europe each year are due to exposure to hazardous substances. In Australia we have a long way to go to even recognise occupational diseases caused by chemicals.

Workers mostly have no quick and easy way to access detailed information on the chemicals they use. With this database, workers will be able to access data cards through the ETUI website on approximately 100,000 chemicals, many thousands of which can cause cancer, allergies, disrupt the hormonal system or put the reproductive system at risk. Each card specifies the chemicals classification and labelling under the (EU) regulations, its main work uses (solvent, cleaner, paint stripper, etc.), how it affects health, and the occupational diseases it causes.

The information can be called up simply by entering either the chemical's name or its identification number in the main international chemical inventories into a search box. Of the 100,000 or so chemicals listed, the trade unions have identified nearly 570 as substances of very high concern (SVHC) for putting on their list of priority substances. These are chemicals commonly used in many workplaces including in Australia. *The RISCTOX database (in English)*.

[Source: OHS REPS Safety Net Journal, 3 July 2014]

What are your rights if you develop skin cancer from your job?

Katrina Stouppos, Associate Comcare Department, Slater & Gordon Lawyers

Unfortunately, Australians continue to be diagnosed with skin cancer conditions, many malignant. In a large number of cases, the cancer is caused by their employment. It is commonplace for employers to require their workers to wear protective clothing, a hat and sunscreen, however this hasn't always been the case. Before the dangers of excessive sun exposure were widely known, many workers performed outdoor duties without proper protection in dangerous ultraviolet light. As a result they suffered skins lesions, melanoma and other skin cancers.

In order to claim workers' compensation under the federal workers' compensation system (or Comcare as it is commonly known), workers who are diagnosed with skin cancer must show their work duties significantly contributed to the cancer. That is, a worker will need to demonstrate their exposure to the sun at work was significant and that any sun exposure as a child or on the weekends during sports or recreation activities was negligible. The worker needs to establish the number of years, time of day and hours each day on average they were exposed to sun at work, particularly while not wearing sun protection.

In addition to claiming medical treatment and any time off work, those whose claims for skin cancer type conditions are accepted by Comcare (or other insurers under the Comcare scheme) have a potential entitlement to make a claim for lump sum compensation for permanent impairment and non-economic loss (pain and suffering). To be entitled to compensation for permanent impairment, a worker must establish that:

- the injury results in a Permanent Impairment of 10% or more under the Comcare guide; and

- the disease is permanent (likely to continue indefinitely) and stable (all reasonable rehabilitative treatment has been undertaken).

The current edition of the Comcare Guide does not have a chapter dealing specifically with cancer conditions. However, the guide takes into consideration the frequency of treatment and uses that as a guide in determining the level of impairment.

Treating a malignant metastasised melanoma as a “skin condition” is often times inadequate given the possible seriousness and secondary effects. Any secondary injuries that develop as a result of the cancer may also be claimed as a separate permanent impairment claim. For example, a worker suffering a melanoma that has metastasised causing a lesion in their spine requiring an operation may claim the spine injury as a separate permanent impairment claim, in addition to the skin disorder claim. Similarly, a worker may understandably find him or herself suffering from psychiatric distress or depression as a result of their cancer diagnosis. The psychiatric injury may be assessed as a separate impairment and attract a separate payment.

In short, any number of injuries to different parts of the body that develop as a result of the compensable cancer condition may be claimed from Comcare as a separate lump sum compensation payment for permanent impairment and non-economic loss (pain and suffering).

Dependency benefits are also available to a worker whose skin cancer is malignant and results in their death. A benefit of \$504,449.16 (current and increases on 1 July each year) may be claimed by a dependent spouse of a worker whose condition results in death. The dependent can also claim a contribution towards funeral expenses and in some circumstances a small weekly payment for dependent children.

It may be difficult to establish the cause of a worker’s skin cancer, particularly if the condition becomes apparent sometime after the significant sun exposure ended. Workers should be encouraged to check their skin frequently for any changes and seek assistance from a doctor if necessary.

If a worker is unfortunately diagnosed with a skin cancer, in addition to seeking the medical help obviously required, they should also seek legal advice to ensure they are receiving their appropriate entitlements, which will range from medical treatment, time off work payments and a lump sum payment.

If you suffer from skin cancer or any other work related injury, please contact your union delegate for further information and advice.

4. Slater & Gordon is a proud partner with the UFU Aviation Branch nationally.

Australia’s leading labour law firm partnered with our union to ensure our membership get world-class legal advice and representation at affordable rates.

Established in 1935, Slater & Gordon has built a powerful reputation as a law firm that fights to achieve the best outcomes for everyday Australians and are proud of their long partnership with Australia’s union movement and representing working people. Today, they offer a broad range of legal services and are more accessible to our membership across Australia than any other law firm.

Need legal advice?

Slater & Gordon offer UFU Aviation members access to a wide range of legal services, including advice relating to **compensation claims, employment law, family law, criminal matters, wills and estates, conveyancing, and much more.**

No matter what your legal matter, Slater & Gordon can assist. All you need is a referral from the union by contacting us on 07 3846 5580 or email ufuavt1@bigpond.com to obtain the discounted benefits they offer.

What member benefits do you receive when referred?

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- 25% national discount on fixed fees# for conveyancing (buying and selling a property);
And more

*Standard Will is not suitable for all circumstances. Please contact the union to obtain your online discount code.

#Conditions apply to fixed fees. Does not include disbursements.

&

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5. Organiser Vacancies

Expressions of interest are sought for Organisers at the following Units:

- Canberra
- Darwin
- Yulara
- Alice Springs
- Perth
- Broome

- Our Organisers are vital to the successful functioning of our Branch. The role of our Organisers is to:
- carry out administration and organisational duties in support of Branch Committee of Management [BCOM] Delegates in their State or Territory;
- act as a substitute for their BCOM Delegate if needed;
- Organise and attend Branch meetings at their Unit;
- When authorised, represent the Union within the State or Territory in which their Unit is located; and
- Other duties that may be given to them by the Branch Committee of Management.

Please advise your BCOM Delegate asap of your interest in becoming an active and vital part of your Union.

6. ACTU July Edition “Your Union Benefits Update.”




Your Union Benefits Update



Member Connect is 100% union owned and adds real value to union membership by saving members money. Our services include:

■ Banking	■ Superannuation
■ Automotive	■ Movies
■ Tyres	■ Home Loans
■ Insurance	■ Credit Cards
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Why don't you explore the benefits?
Call 1300 362 223 or visit
www.memberconnect.com.au

The latest edition of “Your Union Benefits Update” can be viewed on the link below.

<http://www.memberconnect.com.au/newsletters/Member-Update-201407.html>

7. Super News.

Making a disability insurance claim

By Silas Dingiria for AvSuper

It's not something any of us want to happen, but total disablement a risk we all face – especially those working in riskier occupations like fire fighting. If you are unable to work due to a serious injury or illness, your super insurance cover may be able to help you deal with the situation. So here is an overview of AvSuper's disability cover to help you understand your options.



Am I eligible for a claim?

For insurance purposes, disability means you are physically unable to work.

To be eligible for a claim, you must meet the exact definitions in your insurance policy. The definitions specify the types of injuries and illnesses that are covered and include things such as loss of a limb, loss of sight and an inability to care for yourself.

Total and permanent disability (TPD) cover is for a serious injury or illness that means you are unable to ever do any work you are reasonably trained and qualified for. So if you are a trained and experienced fire fighter and permanently lose your sight, you are unable to work as a fire fighter or any associated job and may be eligible for a disability claim. However, if you damaged your leg and couldn't walk, but you were able to work in a fire operations room, for example, you are less likely to qualify.

Total temporary disablement (TTD) cover is also for serious injuries and illnesses, however TTD related to disablement that physically prevents you being able to do your job for a significant time. For example, you may be considered for a serious knee injury that prevents you from working for a significant period of time, while you await surgery or are recuperating.

TTD cover can provide you with money while you are being assessed for TPD and/or while you are recovering, and is separate to any sick leave you may be entitled to. This money can help cover living expenses as well as medical related expenses, and is an additional benefit for our Corporate members.

When assessing your claim, the insurer will consider things such as your age, the actual injury or illness, whether you were working full or part time and any prior work experience (i.e. if you had another job before fire fighting). Each claim is assessed individually and thoroughly.

How do I actually make a claim?

Making a claim involves letting AvSuper know about your situation. It will involve filling in a claim form and probably will need medical statements and other medical evidence of your condition and inability to work.

The process is different for different types of claims so the easiest solution is to simply ring AvSuper. We can tell you about the relevant eligibility requirements and relevant terms and conditions, confirm your current AvSuper cover arrangements and explain the correct process to you.

*Silas Dingiria is the Member Services Manager for **AvSuper, a profit-for-members superannuation fund** dedicated to the aviation industry that also offers income streams. AvSuper operates for the benefit of members, with low fees and strong long term investment returns and is **open to all Australians** wanting personalised service, access to personalised AvSuper specific advice and **competitively priced insurance options**.*

This information is of a general nature only and does not take into account your personal objectives, situation or needs. Before making a decision about AvSuper, you should consider your requirements and the relevant Product Disclosure Statement (PDS). For a copy call 1800 805 088 or visit www.avsuper.com.au. AvSuper (ABN 46 050 431 797, AFSL 239078) is the trustee of the AvSuper Fund (ABN84 421 446 069).



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South East Queensland: Karl McDonald
New South Wales: Al Lerpiniere
Victoria: Jake Callaghan
South Australia: Simon Osborn
Tasmania: Simon Owen
Western Australia: Les Milhinch
Northern Territory: Ricky Nolan

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Deputy WHS Co-ordinator: Vacant

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Coolangatta: Peter Young
Melbourne: Brendon Mimmo
Launceston: Trevor Mortyn
Perth: Vacant
Broome: Vacant
Karratha: John Le Bon
Ayers Rock: Vacant
Avalon: Marc Jansen

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Rockhampton: Phil Turner
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LATELY?**

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