

AMMA MEDIA RELEASE

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Resource employers record escalation in union entry

Over fifty per cent of Australian resource industry employers have recorded increased concerns over union entry requests into their businesses according to a recent business survey.

Research undertaken by the resource industry employer group Australian Mines and Metals Association (AMMA), in conjunction with the RMIT University School of Economics, Finance and Marketing, was conducted over the six month period to October 2010.

AMMA Chief Executive Steve Knott said it was clear from the survey's findings the Fair Work Act's more extensive right of entry provisions was allowing more unions to enter more worksites more frequently – whether there were union members on the premises or not.

“As a consequence we have seen 51.1% of businesses recording increases in unions visiting workplaces.

“It is evident union officials are using the fact the Fair Work Act only requires the union to demonstrate a potential member is present at the business for the union to gain entry for discussion purposes,” Mr Knott said.

“Many visits reported were union membership fishing expeditions, resulting in valuable resources being diverted to chaperone union officials around complex worksites.”

Mr Knott said while union officials must follow a formal procedure in order to gain entry, there was some initial uncertainty amongst employers about the procedure.

“Even as employers get used to the new system, the reality is union visits have become more commonplace which in turn is demanding of more and more management resources,” he said.

Over the six months of the survey period the number of businesses receiving weekly and monthly visits from union officials rose dramatically from 17.5% to 29.4%

“What is of significant concern to AMMA, is in the period since this survey was conducted, certain unions have foreshadowed they are commencing a more aggressive membership drive over 2011, targeting businesses and sites they had not previously entered.

“If these union visits were based on boosting productivity and ensuring safety then most fair-minded employers wouldn't have a problem.

“But when we are seeing health and safety being used as a mere guise to recruit members and promote the union's own interests, then this makes employers question the time and resources involved.

“If this destabilising trend continues then it will be incumbent upon the Parliament to amend the Fair Work Act to protect and promote productivity across the resource industry.” Mr Knott said.

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