

SAVING LIVES AND PREVENTING INJURIES WITH TIMELY COMMUNICATION



Workplace health and safety is the responsibility of every employer. In 2019, Australian 162 workers were fatally injured while working, compared with 144 in 2018. In the first three months of 2020, 38 Australians were killed at work.¹ Many of these incidents could potentially have been avoided with the right measures in place.

Staff members who work in isolation or remotely are at increased risk of suffering a workplace injury or fatality. It's compulsory for employers to monitor the health and wellbeing of any employees working remotely or in isolation.²

Workers can be considered isolated even if other people are close by. According to Safe Work Australia, isolated workers range from community nurses carrying out clinical visits to a group of workers in a base camp in a rural area. Making sure these workers have access to communications and emergency services is crucial when it comes to maintaining their safety.³

1 <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/statistics-and-research/statistics/fatalities/fatality-statistics>

2 <https://www.okaloneworker.com/2019/02/lone-working-legislation-australia/>

3 <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/remote-work>



HOW TIMELY MEDICAL INTERVENTION COULD HAVE SAVED A LIFE

A bricklayer on a job near Airlie Beach in north Queensland died from apparent heatstroke. His workmates weren't sure when to call an ambulance and, in fact, called their employer before calling an ambulance for the unconscious man. The ambulance itself was delayed because of issues with finding the job site.

The coroner's report suggested that the man died between the ambulance being called and its arrival, and further suggested that the man may have survived if he had received first aid treatment when he was first found on the ground, 45 minutes before the ambulance was called and one hour before it arrived.

One of the coroner's recommendations was that an emergency information sheet be placed at job sites that include street cross-references and directions as well as longitudinal coordinates, and emergency contact numbers.¹

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR KEEPING WORKERS SAFE

As well as legal and moral imperatives to keep workers safe, businesses face a commercial reality regarding workplace safety. The costs of workplace incidents include:

- penalties of up to 20 years imprisonment and \$10 million fines if an organisation is found guilty of industrial manslaughter²
- fines in the tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars due to preventable injuries³
- lost productivity and increased workers' compensation costs due to injury.
- reputational impacts.

More than 107,000 Australian workers made serious workers' compensation claims in the 2018 financial year according to the most recent statistics available. Lost time for a typical serious claim was around 5.8 working weeks.⁴ These costs add up quickly and can put pressure on businesses.

HOW TO PROTECT WORKERS AND REDUCE COSTS

Businesses should consider deploying smart technologies to create more reliable and robust connectedness for remote or isolated employees. While two-way radios can provide some limited usefulness, remote and isolated employees often can't rely on this older technology. For example, in the Airlie Beach emergency, ambulance drivers were forced to abandon their attempts to contact dispatch via radio and use their own mobile phones instead.⁵ This creates unacceptable risk in an emergency situation.

1 https://www.courts.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/86864/cif-frizzel-ca-20100219.pdf

2 <http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2019/10/25/first-prosecution-under-queenslands-pioneering-industrial-manslaughter-laws>

3 [https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/news/2019/\\$54000-fine-after-elderly-woman-injured](https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/news/2019/$54000-fine-after-elderly-woman-injured)

4 <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/collection/australian-workers-compensation-statistics>

5 https://www.courts.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/86864/cif-frizzel-ca-20100219.pdf

HERE ARE FIVE WAYS YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR WORKERS' SAFETY:

1 OFFER RAPID EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND MAN-DOWN ALARMS

When someone is working alone, it can be impossible to tell if they're alright. However, with man-down alarms, you can receive an alert, for example, indicating that a worker has stopped moving. You can then check in with the worker immediately and proactively deploy emergency services if needed, getting help to where it's needed sooner.

2 OFFER AUDIO AND VIDEO DURESS CAPABILITY

Sometimes isolated workers find themselves in frightening situations. They may be in someone's home and feel threatened, or they may be facing a wall of fire out in the bush. Regardless of the situation, it's important to provide real-time communications audio and potentially visual (video) status awareness with recording so that the right first responders can be proactively assigned to help them. Recording this information also makes it easier to investigate events after the fact.

3 PROVIDE GPS TRACKING OF REMOTE WORKERS

In an emergency, every second counts. Getting emergency services to an injured worker as fast as possible can depend on accurate location capabilities. With GPS tracking, it's easier to find injured people even if they can't tell you where they are.

4 STAY IN CONTACT THROUGHOUT THE SHIFT

Using two-way radios or mobile phones to stay in touch throughout a worker's shift can be onerous and expensive. It's important to provide workers with a connectivity solution that keeps them in touch and lets you communicate with them clearly. Such an approach should provide minimal-touch functionality so they can receive important information without affecting their concentration, for example while driving. Furthermore, it should offer audio clarity that ensures there is no confusion or misinterpretation of messages due to drop-outs, latency on a call or call distortion.

5 KEEP THE GROUP INFORMED

Sometimes you need to let all your workers know about important urgent information relating to their safety. This could include, for example, information about road closures due to bushfires or a change in operating procedures due to government requirements such as those seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a group conversation feature lets you relay information instantly to multiple users at once. You can control the flow of information by letting only one person speak at a time, reducing confusion and overlapping conversations.

VERTEL PUSH-TO-TALK OVER CELLULAR (POC) IS A POWERFUL COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR ENHANCED WORKPLACE SAFETY AND MANAGEMENT OF FIELD TEAMS

Vertel provides PoC technology that combines the best aspects of land mobile radio with mobile phone networks. This delivers an enhanced mobile communications tool with broad voice and data features as well as GPS tracking, duress alarms, and location sharing.

PoC technology can help you keep your remote and isolated workforces safer, reducing the risk of injury and death due to preventable factors.

To find out more about how Vertel PoC can help your organisation, contact us **1300 837 835** or visit pushtotalk.vertel.com.au.

