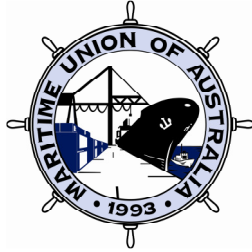


WORKERS HEALTH CENTER



# Behavioural Based Safety

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## Lost Time Injuries

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When I share stories about my experiences working under a BBS System, most people's response is that they refuse to believe that injured workers are treated in this way in Australia. The following scenario's happened whilst I was a delegate.

**True Story #1:** *I went to the lunch room and came across a worker who looked very ill, the left side of his face was sagging down and to me it looked like he was having a stroke.*

*I said to him , "Jimmy are you OK mate", he replied " No Gerkey , I don't feel so good". I had a site phone as they had done away with two way radio's and immediately called the OH&S centre.*

*This had been drummed into us that in an emergency ring the emergency number on your phone, there was no reply, so I called for an ambulance immediately. I met the ambulance at the front gate and escorted them to the worker.*

*I was confronted the following day and told I had not followed proper procedure and it was implied I could be performance counselled. I responded by saying I would be more than happy to defend myself at any time. And I would have no hesitation in backing myself up by informing my Union and calling the regulator .*

*The fact was this man had been overcome by paint thinners and the valuable minutes saved in contacting the Ambulance saved him from possible permanent brain damage.*

*The irony in this story is that the reason I could not contact these people was they were attending a BBQ in recognition of their perfect safety record.*

**True Story #2:** During his shift, a Worker fell down a small hole whilst walking backwards. He was driven by the OHS manager to a local medical centre where the worker was assessed by a doctor retained by the company. After leaving there, they returned to work so the injured worker could clock off. A taxi was arranged for the worker to get home. There was no X-ray, no hospital attendance and no referral to a specialist.....just a box of panadeine forte!

At about 9.00am the following morning, the injured worker's supervisor spoke to me about his concerns regarding the unrealistic expectations of the company. In order for there to be no loss of injury time, the company had organised a taxi to pick the injured worker up from his home the very next morning. They were hopeful this man would continue at four hours everyday, clocking in and out, and thus no injury would be recorded. This would ensure the company's '200 days injury free' statistics would still be intact!

The Supervisor asked if I could do something to intervene as he felt it was wrong because the individual could not even walk! I approached the injured worker who told me that during the taxi ride, he had lain face down on the back seat of the taxi writhing in pain with every bump in the road! He showed me his injuries; his whole backside was black and the bruising continued a quarter way up his spine! I immediately organised an ambulance to a hospital whereupon the diagnosis revealed his coccyx (tailbone) was broken.

The following day, there was still no official record of the injury or the hazard that caused it. The rest of the workforce only found out about it from the other workers who had been in the vicinity of the injured worker. I said to the many managers present at a meeting " TELL ME I'M NOT THE ONLY PERSON IN THIS ROOM WHO FINDS THIS OBSCENE" sure enough they defended this action absolutely.

In order for the company to comply with its duty of care and OHS obligations towards this injured worker, industrial action had to be called.

This is BBS! Twenty years of working under this model has taught me that abuse of injured workers is rife. A BBS model relies on low Loss Time Injury (LTI) statistics as proof of its success! A company adopting this blame-based safety model will do anything to keep its records low. This means fudging the statistics and the toll on the injured worker is catastrophic!

***True Story #3: I questioned these statistics when I was working at a company which proclaimed to be accident free for over 180 days. I had known of at least three accidents that had occurred within the last month (BROKEN ANKLE, FOREIGN BODY IN EYE AND A CUT TO THE HEAD REQUIRING STICHES).***

I finally realised that BBS statistics are moulded to suit the particular company's mathematical equations! The BBS Company determines what constitutes an injury/accident and what does not.

Criteria include: an injury sustained by a casual Worker as apposed to a permanent worker, employment through labour hire, treatment at hospital as opposed to a medical centre and first aid treatment, whether an ambulance is required, returning to work the same day as the injury occurred, coming into work for a couple of hours a day, whether a compensation claim is put in and many other factors are used in working out whether they retain their 200 days accident free.

The fact is the only people who know how they work this out is the company themselves; I call it their dirty little secret. These companies use anything they can to preserve this statistic, so they can spruik to all "WHAT A SAFE COMPANY WE ARE"

In order to intimidate Workers from reporting injuries, BBS companies use the following tactics:

- By accompanying injured Workers into the doctor's surgery, OHS managers are able to influence the back to work duties authorised by the medical practitioner and intimidate the injured worker. BBS companies want the worker back at all costs, 'not provide meaningful work'.
- Workers are often lured into applying for an RDO rather than follow through with a workers compensation claim. Companies play on the fear that a claim will take too long to process and an injured worker will benefit from the money in the next pay packet
- BBS companies bring you back to work after medical treatment so you can clock off. Another injury free day is added to the company's tally so that your injury is not recorded
- By proudly displaying the company's success at reaching its '*200 days injury free*' target, Workers are coerced into remaining silent about injuries in fear of being the person blamed for losing the safety bonus and taking the RECORD 200 DAYS back to '0'.
- By workers accepting rewards for so many injury free days, they became indifferent to injured workers and hazards are allowed to flourish unabated
- Even after requesting union representation, injured Workers have been called to meetings without being allowed to exercise their right. Injured workers have been victimised after seeking my assistance.

Under Australian law, injured workers have the right to due process. I believe it is not in the laws that are passed, but how those laws are applied which defines us.



**True Story #4:** *A worker who had just had surgery on a work related shoulder injury was brought back to work on what the OHS/ Return to Work Coordinator (same person) viewed as suitable duties. It is also worthy to mention that this person was also EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OFFICER.*

*These duties involved sweeping the workshop floor, in doing this duty the worker had to use the arm, which had just undergone invasive surgery. This resulted in the workers hand swelling up like a water balloon. What occurred was in being given these duties and using his injured arm the worker damaged nerves in his injured shoulder.*

*I have had resolutions passed at meetings condemning companies for singling out injured, old and sick workers and the fact that this is not tolerated in society.*

*Yet this has been an operational technique employed by these companies. In these resolutions I have also called for intervention of the company's EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OFFICER.*

*No investigation has ever occurred and no reply has even been given, as in most cases the EEO is the Safety Manager, the person driving BBS. A worker on night shift was thought to be having a heart attack was loaded into the back of a Ute (LIKE A CARCASS OF BEEF) and driven to hospital. The worker recovered however, an ambulance was not called and valuable minutes lost in treating him.*

The costs of these BBS practices are at the sacrifice of the life and wellbeing of Australian Workers. My experience is that these companies cannot be shamed into taking responsible action unless its methods are exposed to the public eye. Even then, in my experience, loss of job for the whistleblower is imminent.

Therefore, it is understandable, that it is a rare occurrence for a Worker to follow through with their concerns lest they lose their job.

Psychological injury as a result of their abuse by the company acerbates the original injury. This lack of duty of care results in the hampering of the healing process..

This is an extremely sad situation indeed. I have been a delegate during periods when very tragic accidents have occurred to workers. Companies that use BBS claim their employees are valued assets and injured workers are treated with dignity and respect.(Nothing could be further from the truth.

The first question I always ask when I've been told a worker has been injured is "ARE THEY OK" the first question BBS employers ask is "HOW DID IT HAPPEN" or "WHAT WAS HE DOING".

I HAVE FOUND CARE FOR THE WORKER THAT IS INJURED, TO BE SECONDARY IN BBS.

An active Union Safety Committee is essential, SAFETY IS UNION BUSINESS. Always remember that BBS tries to make elected delegates the police of workplace policy. Remember that as an elected delegate to always ask questions, there is no such thing as stupid questions only stupid answers.

Therefore if you are in a workplace with BBS, it is absolutely essential for you as a Delegate to keep written records of all your dealings with company representatives.

**No matter how trivial you think it is, your written records are an important link between facts and blame!**

These are true and accurate accounts of my tenure as a delegate; they can be verified by personal diary, meeting minutes, hazard reports, transcripts and Provisional Improvement Notices issued by the regulator, witnesses and the injured workers themselves.