

Port unions demand stronger penalties for negligent employers

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New Zealand's two port unions have spoken out on Workers Memorial Day (28 April), demanding improvements to health and safety in New Zealand ports.

The Maritime Union of New Zealand (MUNZ) and Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) represent thousands of port workers throughout New Zealand.

Leaders of the two unions say port workers are being killed and hurt due to systemic problems in the industry, and things have to change.

MUNZ National Secretary Craig Harrison says the string of deaths and serious accidents at Ports of Auckland over the last few years was a glaring example of the problem, which had recently been exposed by an independent report.

However, health and safety failures were endemic throughout New Zealand ports, with deaths and serious injuries in several container terminals and bulk stevedoring areas such as logging yards.

"There are a number of causes, including a profit driven culture not a health and safety culture, but a big problem is employers refusing to see Unions as the legitimate representatives of workers."

Rail and Maritime Transport Union General Secretary Wayne Butson says many employers are simply paying fines but not changing their practices in meaningful ways.

He says the lesson of Pike River was that health and safety had to come first, but ongoing health and safety failures in ports were indicating the lesson had not been learned.

"Port workers work long hours in tough conditions. Their labour keeps food on our table and delivers the necessities of life to all New Zealanders. In return, they are simply asking to come home safely at the end of their shift to their loved ones."

Both unions are in favour of stronger laws and enforcement of current laws by regulators, and say corporate manslaughter laws need to be on the table.

The two unions are seeking an independent review of health and safety in ports by the Government.

ENDS

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