

Media Release: Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU)
Wednesday June 1, 2010

ACC reforms: Tell the real story behind KiwiRail's safety record improvement

The use of KiwiRail as a pin-up company for improved safety outcomes obscures the fact that worker participation was the key to turning around the rail industry's safety record, the rail workers' union said today.

ACC Minister Nick Smith today sighted KiwiRail as an example of how better safety outcomes can occur at workplaces where employers manage their own accident claims and rehabilitation.

But Rail and Maritime Transport Union General Secretary Wayne Butson said that this significantly overlooked the critical turning point for health and safety in the rail industry.

"In 1999 5 people died in 6 months at the former Tranz Rail. This promoted the 2000 ministerial inquiry which led to the implementation of an employee involvement model to turn around the company's safety record," Wayne Butson said.

"Health and safety action teams were established at all locations and levels of the company, and a joint health and safety executive which these action teams feed into."

"It was employee involvement in establishing a safety culture which delivered the major turnaround in injury levels within the company, and significant change in work practices with many established but unsafe ways of working being outlawed by mutual consent."

"Management cannot do it alone. Employee involvement and getting everyone to take responsibility is critical."

"In light of this, it is distressing in the extreme to see the introduction of ACC reforms which place the profit interests of the insurance industry, ahead of the principles of worker involvement, at the heart of accident compensation and rehabilitation in New Zealand," Wayne Butson said.

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