

Unions call for national standards in stevedoring health and safety

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Unions in the ports and maritime sector are demanding national stevedoring standards be introduced to deal with the health and safety crisis in New Zealand ports.

Three unions in the sector have jointly written to the Minister of Workplace Relations and Safety this week following another tragic death on the waterfront.

26 year old Atiroa Tuaiti, an employee of private stevedoring company Wallace Investments, died on Tuesday 19 April at Ports of Auckland after a fall aboard a container ship he was working on.

Rail and Maritime Transport General Secretary Wayne Butson says the industry was devastated to see the loss of another young life in the workplace.

He says circumstances surrounding the death are being investigated through the appropriate mechanisms.

“Another death in the Ports of Auckland after the last few years is a severe blow and a further sign that something is badly wrong in the port industry.”

The unions noted the employer in this case was not the Ports of Auckland, he says.

“However, the recent health and safety inquiry into POAL revealed important information that is now being used to improve health and safety culture, and all port companies have a responsibility as a PCBU for all workers in their port.”

Mr Butson says there have also been a number of deaths and serious injuries in stevedoring in other ports in New Zealand.

“This is a systemic issue in the stevedoring industry and not confined to one port or employer.”

He says the unions are calling for robust and enforceable national standards in health and safety in the ports industry.

Mr Butson says an investigation into the factors that have caused so many deaths and injuries in the stevedoring industry must take place involving industry, Government and union.

“We would expect issues such as hours of work, shift patterns, productivity pressures, training, fatigue, equipment, processes and PCBU responsibilities to be looked at.”

“From this process, we would expect an outcome of national standards for stevedoring operations in port health and safety to be developed and introduced in an urgent timeframe.”

Mr Butson says it is clear that unless there is immediate action, it is only a matter of time before another worker’s life is taken, with the devastating implications this can have on families and communities.

ENDS

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