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AWU Demands Concerning Alcoa Health Study

29 June 2002

The preliminary findings of a study conducted by alumina company Alcoa into the health of its Australian workforce has revealed some concerning statistics, AWU National Secretary Bill Shorten said today.

"The AWU (which has 3,500 members at Alcoa across Victoria and WA) has responded to the preliminary findings of Alcoa's Healthwise Study by demanding urgent action from the company in response to the report," said Mr Shorten,

The preliminary findings of the study reveal three key areas of concern:

The survey of a group of workers (past and present) indicate that the incidence of respiratory cancers (but not mortality) was higher than the expected general incidence of this type of condition.

Numbers of melanoma (skin cancers) cases found were higher than the expected general incidence of this type of condition in Western Australia.

5 cases of pleural cancers (type of lung cancer-asbestos related mesothelioma) were found which is also higher than the expected general incidence of this type of condition.

Each of these results is considered to be 'statistically significant' meaning they reveal a higher incidence than that considered to be 'expected' in the general community.

Mr Shorten said the AWU is concerned by the preliminary findings and has made demands on the company, which aim to make investigations to the next level urgently, provide information to workers, and establish a transparent process for the management of the issue.

The AWU has demanded and got the following action from Alcoa:

A smaller targeted study to ascertain any possible correlation between the findings and specific job classifications or tasks.

Medical testing for past and present employees and contractors for the three relevant diseases on request.

An AWU established team to provide information to the sites.

A temporary Occupational Health and Safety spokesperson appointed on each site to act as liaisons on this issue - fully resourced by the company.

The study's main investigators: Associate Professor Malcolm Sim (Monash University,



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Victoria), professor Bill Musk (University of WA) and Dr Lin Fritschi (University of WA), to be made available for information and meetings throughout all Alcoa sites.

AWU Western Australian Secretary Tim Daly has approached the Premier of Western Australia asking that the WA Government create Australia's first independent OHS Ombudsperson, whose job would be to deal with the issues identified in this study.

For further comment please contact:

Bill Shorten (AWU National Secretary) on 0419 105 263

Tim Daly (AWU WA Secretary) on 0419 907 036, or

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