

## General Assistant Advisory Group meeting report back to members

Members are advised that the General Assistant's Advisory Group (GAAG) met on 19 March 2019. This bulletin reports back to members on the main issues discussed.

### 1. Cleaning Air Conditioners

With the increase in the number of air conditioners in schools, the GAAG moved a motion that the PSA write and meet with the DoE to discuss this matter.

The GAAG Delegates agree that the cleaning/servicing of air conditioners is not a GA's job. GAAG Delegates are concerned about the work health and safety issues involved in the cleaning and servicing of air conditioners.

Concerns raised by delegates include:

Exposure of GAs to the noxious particulates accumulated due to air conditioner usage such as dust, bacteria, mould and other noxious particles;

Chemical handling - air conditioners require special cleansers and anti-bacterial treatments to be effective in promoting safe flow of uncontaminated air;

Potential electrocution during the cleaning and servicing of air conditioners. During servicing, best safety practices require the unit to be isolated from the power supply.

The GAAG Delegates consider that the cleaning and servicing of air conditioners requires a qualified professional.

### 2. Dust Extractors

GA members have enquired about the union's position regarding emptying and cleaning dust extractors in schools. Emptying and cleaning dust extractors have some work health and safety issues. Occupational lung diseases such as asthma and cancer can result from inhaling dust into your lungs.

Further, if you swallow wood dust it can have serious health impacts on your intestines, blood stream and other vital organs. Wood dust can also irritate your eyes and damage your vision. You may also have skin ulcerations, rashes and dermatitis with exposure to wood dust.

The GAAG Delegates consider that the cleaning and servicing of dust extractors requires a qualified professional.

### 3. Asbestos in schools

Members advise that asbestos in schools remains a concern. If you think that you may have been exposed to asbestos during your work at school as a GA you should immediately report your concerns to the incident reporting hotline on **1800 811 523**.

The GAAG also discussed historical exposure to asbestos prior to the DoE's introduction of the asbestos register. The DoE has an ongoing duty of care to its employees both current and past when it comes to asbestos exposure.

### 4. Outstanding issues

#### Chemical handling and training

The DoE's position is that GAs do not require a certificate 3 to undertake chemical handling in schools as it exceeded requirements for a GAs role. It has advised that it will develop its own training and deliver it via the Learning and High Performance directorate. At this point, there has been no further update on progress from the DoE.

#### PPE entitlement

The PSA raised reviewing the PPE entitlement with the DoE late 2018. The union still has no response. In some schools, GAs have no issue with getting necessary PPE as their Principal wishes to ensure the



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health and welfare of their GA. More broadly, at this point, there has been no further update on reviewing PPE from the DoE. The union will again raise this matter with the DoE.

### Exam Desks

The PSA raised reviewing the new exam desks with the DoE late 2018, again without a response. Initially the DoE advised that this was a one off purchase at one school. Since raising this, other members in different schools have advised that their schools have begun to replace old exam desks with the bulkier heavier version.

The new desks are heavier and bulkier than previous models. Members advise that using these new desks are a two person job and that set up and pull down

takes longer than previously. Members concerns are around an increase in back and knee injuries due to the additional 3kgs per desk.

The union's position is that in all areas of a GA undertaking potentially hazardous tasks a thorough risk assessment should be undertaken by the school involving the DoE's local work health and safety experts. If you are directed to set up, pull down the new exam desks, and believe you need assistance then speak to your line manager prior to injuring yourself.

### Next meeting

The next meeting of the GAAG is scheduled for 21 May 2019. If there are any issues you wish to raise please contact your local GAAG Delegate.

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