

\$116,000 back-paid to building apprentices in Tasmania

28 August 2013

The Fair Work Ombudsman has recovered more than \$116,000 for underpaid apprentices in Tasmania as part of a campaign focussing on the state's residential building industry.

Fair Work Inspectors audited 150 randomly selected businesses across Tasmania, who employ first year apprentices, and found that 60 businesses (40 per cent) were meeting their obligations under workplace laws, while 90 (60 per cent) were in breach.

The campaign targeted employers who employ apprentices in trades such as carpentry, bricklaying, painting, plastering and roof tiling. While only employers with first year apprentices were selected for an audit, the campaign included all apprentices at those businesses.

Of the businesses in breach, 46 employers were found to have underpaid 86 apprentices a total of \$116,412, while many others had only record-keeping and technical contraventions. One audit is still underway as a more detailed investigation is required.

Businesses found to have underpaid apprentices were at locations including Burnie, Devonport, Hobart, Kingston, Lauderdale, Launceston, Legana, New Norfolk, Port Sorell, Ulverstone and Wynyard.

Underpayments at individual businesses ranged from less than \$100 to more \$22,000 for an adult apprentice at a Hobart business who was inadvertently paid junior apprentice rates.

St Helens and surrounding towns had the highest compliance rate of 75 per cent, followed by Hobart and surrounding areas (46 per cent), Devonport and surrounding towns (35 per cent), Launceston and surrounding towns (32.5 per cent) and New Norfolk, where the two businesses audited were both in breach.

Fair Work Ombudsman, Natalie James, said the audits showed many employers had increased the wages of apprentices as they advanced through their apprenticeship but had not passed on annual July 1 wage increases which apply to most staff in the industry.

"While the overall contravention rate was disappointing, it is pleasing that all employers were willing to voluntarily back-pay their staff without the need for further action," Ms James said.

Fair Work Inspectors assisted all employers to rectify non-compliance issues and helped them to put processes in place to ensure the problems were not repeated.

Ms James said Tasmania's residential building industry was targeted because it employs many young apprentices and is a persistent source of complaints to the Fair Work Ombudsman.

"Young workers can be vulnerable, as they're often not fully aware of their workplace rights and can be reluctant to complain, so we place a high priority on taking action to protect them," she said.

"We focused on businesses employing first year apprentices so that we could help employers to get things right from the start of their employees' apprenticeships."

Employers and employees seeking information should use the free tools and resources available at www.fairwork.gov.au, which includes an 'Industries' section with information specific to the building and construction industry, or call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94. An interpreter service is available on 13 14 50.

Find out more:

- [Tasmanian residential building apprentices program final report - August 2013 \(PDF 306.6KB\) \(www.fairwork.gov.au/Article-Documents/714/Tasmanian-Residential-Building-Apprentices-Program-Final-Report-August-2013.pdf.pdf.aspx\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/Article-Documents/714/Tasmanian-Residential-Building-Apprentices-Program-Final-Report-August-2013.pdf.pdf.aspx)
- [Tasmanian residential building apprentices program final report - August 2013 \(DOCX 5.6MB\) \(www.fairwork.gov.au/Article-Documents/714/Tasmanian-Residential-Building-Apprentices-Program-Final-Report-August-2013.docx.aspx\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/Article-Documents/714/Tasmanian-Residential-Building-Apprentices-Program-Final-Report-August-2013.docx.aspx)

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Fair Work Online: www.fairwork.gov.au

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Hearing & speech assistance

Call through the National Relay Service (NRS):

For TTY: 13 36 77. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

Speak & Listen: 1300 555 727. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

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