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MEDIA RELEASE

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

Transport of Dangerous Goods

The Auditor-General, Peter Achterstraat, today called for improvements in how the Office of Environment and Heritage and WorkCover NSW regulate the transport of dangerous goods.

Dangerous goods make up 10-15% of domestic freight and have potential to harm people, property and the environment. They include substances such as explosives, flammable liquids and gases, and oxidising agents.

“The good news is that the number of crashes of heavy trucks carrying some of the more common types of dangerous goods has been gradually decreasing, in line with general improvements in heavy trucks safety”, said Mr Achterstraat.

However, Government inspection programs were limited. The Office of Environment and Heritage carried out very few checks in the four years up to 2010, with no inspections made in the metropolitan area. This is despite Port Botany handling around 50,000 containers of dangerous goods per year. Statewide, only 303 inspections were made in 2009/10 and only 20 in 2008/09.

“In 2010, when compliance checks included the metropolitan area, 44% of road vehicles inspected had breached some of the regulations,” said Mr Achterstraat.

Agencies have limited information on operators and movements of dangerous goods on our roads and rail lines.

“While efforts are underway to improve information, it is difficult to get a clear picture of where the risks to human life and the environment are greatest,” said Mr Achterstraat.

Dangerous goods regulations require all accidents involving the transport of dangerous goods be reported to the Office of Environment and Heritage.

“The NSW Centre for Road Safety reported nearly 60 crashes involving transport of dangerous goods in 2009-10. However, the Office of Environment and Heritage received reports of only 11 incidents in the same period. Information about dangerous goods incidents needs to improve,” said Mr Achterstraat.

There is little evidence that the Office of Environment and Heritage and WorkCover share information on those transporting dangerous goods and whether they breach any regulations. The Office of Environment and Heritage can certainly work more closely with RTA when issuing dangerous goods licences to reduce the chance of licences being fraudulently obtained.

“Agencies who share responsibility for regulating the transportation of dangerous goods must work more closely to better use their resources and target areas of greatest risk”, said Mr Achterstraat.

Mr Achterstraat recommended that the Office of Environment and Heritage and WorkCover NSW do more to:

- target the most dangerous operators and places, and penalise those that do not comply with the requirements
- tighten checks on licensing and training programs to reduce the possibility of fraud and corruption.

Mr Achterstraat said:

“It is pleasing that accidents involving the transportation of dangerous goods are on the decline and that there have been recent improvements in the number of inspections. But our regulatory regime has been weak with little coordination between agencies and knowledge about the transportation of dangerous goods in this State.”

Further Information - Contact Barry Underwood, Executive Officer, on 9275 7220 or 0403 073 664.

Examples of dangerous goods

| Class | Description | Examples |
|-------|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1 | explosives | dynamite |
| 2 | gases | natural gas |
| 3 | flammable liquids | petrol |
| 4 | flammable solids | phosphorous |
| 5 | oxidising substances | ammonium nitrate |
| 6 | toxic and infectious substances | pesticides |
| 7 | radioactive materials | medical isotopes |
| 8 | corrosive substances | acids |
| 9 | environmentally hazardous substances | asbestos |

Source: Australian Dangerous Goods Code 2009

Office of Environment and Heritage state-wide roadside inspection program

Compliance checks of road vehicles carrying dangerous goods

| Region | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| North West | 16 | 38 | 26 | 18 | 62 |
| South | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 137 |
| North East | 7 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 29 |
| Metropolitan | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 75 |
| Total | 25 | 43 | 31 | 20 | 303 |

Source: OEH 2010

WorkCover NSW inspection activity

Inspection activity on dangerous goods

| Type | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|
| Complaints | 286 | 634 | 562 | 648 | 812 |
| Incidents | 38 | 48 | 54 | 86 | 85 |
| Prevention visits, audits, verification checks | 100 | 308 | 281 | 568 | 444 |
| Total | 424 | 990 | 897 | 1302 | 1341 |

Source: WorkCover 2011