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Media Release: WorkSafe Culture Reset

Business Canterbury welcomes updated expectations given to WorkSafe by Workplace Relations and Safety Minister, Hon Brooke van Velden. The Minister's letter of expectations requires WorkSafe to refocus on critical risk and to view health and safety guidance as a core role alongside enforcement.

Business Canterbury Chief Executive, Leeann Watson says, "Almost since the formation of WorkSafe more than a decade ago, we have been hearing stories from businesses which have experienced a heavy-handed regulator, with inconsistent and inflexible enforcement, followed through with a lack of support for what solutions might look like."

The announcement follows recent changes to the Health and Safety in Work Act, which have been positively received by the business community.

"Recent announcements around the refocus of the Health and Safety in Work Act have been great, but this refocus for WorkSafe was the logical next step, and the business community will be waiting with bated breath for these reset expectations to turn into reality when inspectors come to visit.

"WorkSafe should be proactive and be seen as a safe agency to engage with to achieve real health and safety outcomes, as opposed to them being the last resort for businesses.

"There is significant business interest in what these changes will mean, with many feeding their experiences directly into the Minister at a Health and Safety Roadshow session held at Business Canterbury last year.

"This is quick, decisive action and we commend the Minister."

Talking Points

- Commend the Minister on pulling all the levers available to her to make change in this space.
- Was the logical 'next step' for the Minister following changes to HSaW announced a month or two ago.
- Businesses have been battling with a heavy-handed, inconsistent and inflexible regulator for years.
- Lost count of the number of stories of harrowing experiences with regulators on the ground.
- A common story is "WorkSafe visited and gave us an improvement notice, but won't tell us how to fix it"
- Refocus on critical risks not all risks, and on advice and engagement as opposed to just enforcement will be welcomed by the business community.
- But businesses will be waiting with bated breath for the letter of expectations sent to WorkSafe leaders to filter through the culture of the organisation when the inspectors come to visit.