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Pay docked for workers' whip-round

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Anger as break labelled 'illegal action'

BUILDING workers have been docked four hours' pay for briefly stopping work to collect money for the family of a colleague killed on a construction site.

The workers were docked under the Federal Government's new **workplace** laws, which require bosses to deduct a minimum four hours' pay for any unauthorised stoppages.

Hooker Cockram general manager Matthew Dalmau confirmed he had advised subcontractors working on a Defence Department site in Port Melbourne to dock the pay of about 25 workers.

The workers stopped for about 20 minutes on Friday to collect \$470 for the widow of Christos Binos, 58, who was crushed to death by a concrete panel at a Pakenham building site on March 8.

Mr Dalmau said the law required the unions to request a stoppage in writing, otherwise it was considered illegal **industrial** action for which the workers must have their pay docked. Employers who failed to deduct the wages could be fined up to \$33,000.

"So our hands are tied," Mr Dalmau said. "If the unions had requested it in writing prior to the event, of course we would have approved it."

A Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy **Union** delegate on the site, Steve Barun, said the company was told the day before that a **union** organiser was coming to the site, and given about 10 minutes' notice in writing before the meeting.

"All the guys were happy to give, and it's bitten them in the arse," he said. "Everyone is shaking their heads in disbelief."

CFMEU state secretary Martin Kingham said stopping work to collect money for the families of killed workers had a long tradition in the building **industry**.

"The meeting was not designed to penalise Hooker Cockram," he said.

"It's not a political thing, it's not an **industrial** thing. But as a consequence of all this legislation . . . everything we do becomes **industrial** and therefore illegal in their eyes."

Mr Kingham suggested that in future, workers would stop work for at least half a day if they were not going to get paid.

"Employers are going to lose four to five hours' production rather than 10 to 15 minutes," he said.

Mr Kingham also said that Hooker Cockram would always comply with the Federal Government's national code and guidelines for the building **industry**, which limits **union** involvement on sites, otherwise it would be prevented from tendering for future government work.

The incident follows a similar threat from St Vincent de Paul Aged Care and Community Services to dock nurses four hours' pay for a one-hour protest last month, which was overturned by upper management.

A spokeswoman for **Workplace** Minister **Kevin Andrews** said employees wanting to stop work had to approach their employer for authorisation.

Master Builders Association of Victoria executive director Brian Welch backed the laws as being "highly desirable" to stop wildcat strikes and said Hooker Cockram had "acted in accordance with the law".

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