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Sick leave battlefield - Department claims memo had a 'mistake'

Author: Denis Peters
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Department claims memo had a `mistake'

A FEDERAL Government department says one of its officers made a mistake in a memo to staff saying a doctor's certificate was required for every day of sick leave.

The internal Department of Employment and Workplace Relations memo was leaked to the Opposition, sparking claims the Government is interfering in day-to-day employment relationships.

DEWR is the engine room for the sweeping WorkChoices regime of industrial relations laws and has aggressively moved in the past to shift its own staff on to the Howard Government's preferred Australian Workplace Agreements.

Labor's IR spokesman Stephen Smith said the memo reflected the new reality of the WorkChoices laws.

The leaked memo, from DEWR's building and policy development branch, referred to new sick leave arrangements under AWAs.

``In the future, new AWAs will require that a medical certificate be produced for all sick leave absences of one day or more," it stated.

``This will be standard across the department because the current AWA clause already allows this to happen."

After Mr Smith made the document public, DEWR secretary Dr Peter Boxall issued a statement saying the department's policy on sick leave had not changed.

He said the policy allowed no more than three consecutive days' personal leave to be taken without medical evidence or a personal declaration in the case of caring responsibilities.

But after a worker had taken three consecutive days off, their manager was entitled to ask them to produce evidence for any further leave taken, Dr

Boxall said.

DEWR's general manager (corporate) Jeremy O'Sullivan said the manager who prepared the memo had made a mistake.

Mr Smith said Prime Minister John Howard had given assurances last year that employers would maintain the standard requirement that staff produce a medical certificate after three or more sick days.

He said it was unfair and impractical to require workers to produce a medical certificate for one day of absence.

A spokesman for Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews declined to comment.

ACTU secretary **Greg Combet** said the development reflected meanness and dishonesty in the new laws.

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