



Row over workplace safety Bill

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EMBATTLED Industrial Relations Minister Russell Wortley has rejected legal advice claiming he wrongly interpreted how new workplace safety laws would affect volunteers.

Legal advice seen by *The Advertiser*, commissioned by a group of residential housing originations who oppose the new laws, says Mr Wortley gave incorrect information in a radio interview this week when he said safety obligations for volunteers would not change.

The advice from Bradbrook Lawyers says a volunteer is not treated the same as a worker or an employee under the current laws but would be under the new laws – and this would place a raft of new obligations on volunteers to ensure workplace safety. But Mr Wortley said this was wrong.

Volunteers for organisations that paid employees were already treated as workers under current laws, he said.

“Our message to any volunteer groups concerned about the proposed Bill is this: Your OHS duties

will not change,” Mr Wortley said. “It’s really important people understand this because there has been a lot of scaremongering out there.”

The laws are part of a Federal Government push to harmonise workplace safety laws nationally and South Australia must pass the legislation to receive about \$30 million in tied federal funding.

But the changes have come under fire from business groups and the Opposition, who say they will increase costs and put volunteers at greater risk of fines and prosecution for workplace safety breaches.

Volunteering SA & NT chief executive officer Evelyn O’Loughlin supported the move, saying it would mean fewer obligations for volunteer organisations without paid staff.

But Housing Industry Association SA regional director Robert Harding said there was a “divergence of views” on the changes and he was concerned they would only be clarified once challenged in court.

The Opposition has drafted amendments to the proposed laws and expects responses from key stakeholders by mid next week.