

Health concern for workers on eve of Alcoa closure

By NOEL MURPHY

RETRENCHED Alcoa staff need to guard against depression and other mental health issues in coming months, Beyondblue has warned ahead of 520 workers losing their jobs at Point Henry next week.

Beyondblue's Tony McManus said they could find themselves struggling to find a routine or purpose after the "initial euphoria" of a large payout and a break from work wore off.

He warned them against retreating into their "man caves" and losing important social ties with friends and others.

The 520 workers losing their jobs next week are among 800 who will be out of work after Alcoa's Point Henry Plant closes.

Mr McManus, a mental health advocate and ambassador for Beyondblue, urged Alcoa workers - and 120 recently laid-off Ford workers - to treat their forced unemployment as "long-service leave" and a chance to rest, recover and regroup.

Recent figures showed a five per cent rise in psychological distress levels across the region since 2008, in tandem

with job insecurity and manufacturing sector redundancies.

Mr McManus suggests retrenched assess their financial situation and whether they had to work as much as in the past.

They could also consider helping community services with their mentoring skills, he said.

"Volunteering is a very good way for them to keep themselves stimulated.

"If they're interested in refugees, they might like to do some work with Diversitat. They could maybe do some work with retirement homes, maybe with Big Brothers Big Sisters, helping at-risk youth.

"The important thing is they don't retreat to the proverbial man cave."

Mr McManus said maintaining social networks was crucial for laid-off workers and pointed to drop-in centres such as Geelong Museum of Motoring and Industry.

"Mixing with people who've worked in the same circles can be important."

Mr McManus said anyone experiencing problems should talk with their partner or colleagues and, if necessary, their GP.



CONCERNS: Beyondblue Geelong ambassador Tony McManus.
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