

HSE ANNUAL REPORT & WAY FORWARD FOR 2004

Ed started his presentation by saying that it was a time of significant challenge and change for HSE. The common view was that the dominant influences were the changes in the economy and the patterns of employment. In contrast he had found, on his frequent visits with Inspectors, there was still a large manufacturing sector, particularly in the West Midlands. Added to which, there were plenty of SMEs many of whom were busy and prosperous and well managed. Although there were more service industries, there were still millions employed in Engineering, Construction and Agriculture where there were some significant risks. Raising standards, compliance and culture will not happen by themselves in the SMES, where there are vulnerable workers amongst Agency staff and youngsters. A large sector of Society has not changed and the 'new approach' will not be better just because it acknowledges new industries with different problems. Even after 170 years of prescriptive law, accidents have not been eliminated, so the more voluntary 'self-regulatory' philosophy is unlikely to accomplish a startling transformation.

In referring to the "Revitalising Health and Safety" initiative, **Ed** suggested they were more, or less on course for 2010. He cited reductions in '**Falls from Height**' and '**Contact with Vehicles**' in support of this opinion. **Peter Evans** asked if there was an element of 'under-reporting' in the figures and **Ed** stated that it was not indicated. He added that these raw figures were not split into sector results, either. **Mike Wilkinson** suggested that the 1992 results did not support **Ed's** conclusions and a general discussion ensued about the choice of meaningful parameters to on which to focus in order to achieve targets. **Ed** suggested that the April 2004 might produce a more detailed analysis of results.

On the crucial issue of inspections, **Ed** said the approach had been changed significantly with more emphasis on the topics in the 'Revitalising' strategy. Inspectors now only prosecute on obvious contraventions and Management Issues. He stated that 90% of complaints were investigated, although this might not entail a visit. Complaints Officers confirm follow-up actions with the complainant.

Ed admitted that fewer accidents were investigated and confirmed that there were no selection criteria for accidents to be investigated. He said that there were more 'Major Injuries' in the West Midlands.

Peter Evans stated that many experienced inspectors were retiring and the HSE were losing a lot of invaluable knowledge with this process. He enquired what training was given to new entrants to remedy this loss? **Ed** replied that it usually goes across the full range of disciplines, but might specialise in one or two topics. He added that the Field Operations Directorate (FOD) has to deal with a wide range of activities and has **always** failed to visit enough, usually after an accident or complaint. A relatively new measure to counter the shortage of resources is the

use of Workplace Contact Officers. The theory is that it is better to have a visit from **someone** – even if it is not an inspector! **Peter Evans** suggested that referrals ought to be made to **BHSEA!**

Ed went on to say that the proposed HSE budget was not as great as originally planned but did show a slight increase. He also offered the opinion that the policy makers at the top of HSE who were introducing change had not been promoted through the Inspector ranks and, therefore, did not have sufficient ‘feel’ for the job. Looking to the future, **Ed** referred to the recent Consultation Document, “**A Strategy for Workplace Health and Safety in Great Britain to 2010 and beyond**” This was a significant paper and BHSEA’s **Harry Jakeman, Warwick Adams and Andy Chappell** had been closely involved in the consultation process. This had been done by means of focus groups, telephone contacts, Regional events and meetings with ‘hard-to-reach’ groups. The strong BHSEA opinion was that it was a very flawed document and this was matched by our fellow participants at the Regional events that we attended. We made detailed written comments in our own right and **Ed** confirmed that our very forthright feedback had been faithfully conveyed to the HSE hierarchy. Having examined the printed feedback on the HSE website it is possible to recognise some of our comments and the tone of the others indicates how much the original proposals have been castigated. **Ed** gave us one or two snippets of the points that were made: -

- Inspectors should offer advice as well as enforcement.
- Businessmen used to contact with HSE do not demonstrate any fear about enforcement. It is well known that Inspectors are not looking for an opportunity to prosecute on their first visit to factories!
- HSE/Las should act as sources of advice.
- HSE should not spend too many resources on ‘peripheral’ activities.
- No support for reducing inspections.
- Should be more inspections of ‘hard to reach’ groups.
- Communications should be in clearer English.
- Documents are too long and complex.
- Moratorium on publications lifted as a result of this consultation.

Ed concluded with the comment that more direct, common sense was needed in the approach to controlling risks.

George Allcock of GKN asked if there was a move to impose more innovative penalties? **Ed** replied that he was uncertain about the benefits of some measures. It was well known that large firms were afraid of creating a poor public image. A sentence of Community Service for a Company Director would certainly affect his image very badly! In Germany, he said, there were Approved Training Schemes for Directors and Insurance firms offered reduced premiums, both of which were more productive than a fine.