

January 2006

## HSE Report on 2005 and Looking Forward to 2006 Marcia Davies, Regional Director, HSE Midlands Region

HSE thinking had come on a long way from putting guards on machines! These are changing times and she added that longer working hours, workers retiring at an older age, and the difficulties with absorbing overseas workers into the labour force. She likened the latter to Harry Rednapp having difficulty with communicating to his team of foreign players!

All of this gave widened priorities against measured goals and added that Dr. Nerys Williams, past BHSEA Vice-President, was working on a project to rehabilitate workers after an accident. Over all of this was the crucial objective to reduce 'red-tape' to a minimum, especially for small businesses! It was also vital, Marcia added, for people to have confidence in Health and safety, as the "Bonker – Conkers" story revealed. Improvement relied on the forming of "Partnerships" in the H & S community and Government, with the important involvement of Trade Unions in all Sectors.

The "Revitalising" campaign was still being driven forward, with Public Sector Agreements being an essential element. Marcia showed how self-reported absences were on a steady decrease and that this was encouraging. BUT – there was no clear change in death rates or Major Injuries and that, she commented, was worrying because they were very unlikely to be caused by reporting errors. She went on to ask the audience if they had any idea why the trends in Over-3-Day Accident Reports seemed to be down and asked for feedback on this development. George Allcock of GKN Engineering commented that it was easy for employers to manage time than the risks. Dennis Walley of Homeserve plc added the opinion that employers were tending to encourage people back to work, rather than let them wallow on their sickbed! Kerry Edwards of 4 Safe Health Ltd., offered the thought that a number of short-term contractors were just not interested in reporting accidents.

On a more optimistic note, Marcia did report improvements in the Construction Industry.

A relatively new strategy in the field Operations Directorate is known as the FIT3 Campaign:

- Fit for Life
- Fit for Work
- Fit for Tomorrow

The work plan for the next few months, Marcia added, was to set priorities which would best deliver the reductions required under "Revitalising". This would involve higher profile national projects, with not so many independent local campaigns. High on the list was the long-term problem of slips, trips and falls, which still contributed to  $\frac{1}{3}$  of major injuries and where much more effort was needed. Included in this plan were projects on Transport, Noise and Vibration.

In the field of Health, the focus is shifting, Marcia reported, with an awareness that these problems were not so easy to identify. The causes of Anxiety, Depression and Back Pain could often be rooted in a worker's domestic life style and, certainly, the effects were felt in both aspects of life – hence the 24/7 Worker concept! The main thrust of Government strategy here is "**Don't cause the Injury or Ill health**" in the first place BUT "**Get them back quickly**" if you do injure them!

Under the **Fit3 Campaign**, there are these main elements: -

1. There are to be Management Standards for assessing stress.
2. In tackling **Musculo-Skeletal Disorders**, the emphasis would be on Backs, Upper Limb Disorders, Early reporting, improved Treatment and Rehabilitation.
3. Disease reduction will be concerned with 4,500 deaths from Asthma, Asbestos Exposure and Contact Dermatitis
4. Managing Sickness Absence will become increasingly important and encouragement of an early return to work will be a major element of this approach.

There are case studies on the HSE Website and there will be Public Seminars.

Marcia then went on to another initiative, **Health Connect**, which is to be launched by the Minister on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2006, in the West Midlands. This is to be aimed at small firms, will have "own branding" in partnership with HSE and three Service Levels: -

1. An Advice Line, UK-wide for Employers **and** Employees.
2. Employers **only** advice in five areas, involving Human Focus workplace advice on return to work and a Website.

### 3. Chargeable Signposting to specialists.

It will be rolled out nationally by 2008.

The implications for the work of the HSE, Marcia said, would be innovative incentives for small firms, with acceptable styles of advice and support.

Turning to Construction, Marcia added that there was cause for some satisfaction from its success with a 28% fall in fatal accidents since 1999/2000 and a 22% fall in Major Injuries in the same period. Whilst Slips, Trips and Falls were markedly reduced and the ill-health results were also on target!

Drawing lessons from its achievements, it was important to target resources on a specific industry, with a common 'language' and culture. Equally it was important to engage all levels and parts of the industry and to aim help and advice at the small firms. Multi-site firms were a significant to address, as were supply chains and the major causes of injury.

#### Questions

**George Allcock of GKN plc** asked Marcia to clarify the sources of the figures for Working Days lost. Marcia replied that the Ill-health figures were from self-reported data, whilst the Injury data was from both RIDDOR and self-reported information.

Malcolm Copson of Geopost enquired about the availability of stress management standards for workplace transport activities. Marcia said that it was available, but lack of time had prevented her from presenting it. She added that some reports showed that EC workers seemed to return to work sooner than their UK counterparts.

Kerry Edwards of 4 Safe Health Ltd. commented on the confidentiality issues surrounding Occupational Health and Stress issues in the workplace and where the dividing line. Marcia said that a sick note usually confirmed any diagnosis and the treatment usually followed a defined course.

Gerry Mulholland of Laing O'Rourke said it was good to see that the construction Industry had achieved some success, but wondered how to sell that success UK-wide? Marcia was of the opinion that, as it was 'early days', it was probably wise to wait and see!

Roger Taylor of National Grid Metering commented on his firm's success with a stress management programme and said it relied very much on making managers very aware of the nature and control of the issues and to make the workers just as aware of the part they could play in improving the situation.

As there were no more questions, the Chairman Mark Hoare commented that stress was likely to be of growing interest, particularly with longer working lives, the 'Harry Rednapp, language barrier syndrome', tight deadlines like on the Olympics and restructuring in Government departments! He finished by thanking Marcia for such a comprehensive review of the current situation and asked the members to show their appreciation. He then formally closed the meeting