

Keynote Presentation on 14th January 2008

HSE work in 2008/09

Dr. Paul Billinger, HM Principal Inspector, HSE West Midlands Region

Paul apologised for Nick Ratty, Head of Operations not being able to attend because of urgent matters to address elsewhere. He went on to explain that the significant changes currently occurring in HSE West Midlands Groups had resulted in him taking on responsibility for Birmingham, Solihull, Coventry and Dudley, whilst his counterpart, Brian covered Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Walsall. He commented that his presentation would be restricted to the Field Operations Directorate and would not include Construction or Major Hazards Work plans.

The main themes of the work plan were based on the Fit 3 Campaign ('Fit for Work, Fit for Life, Fit for Tomorrow') objectives to improve performance: -

- In the Public sector, Stress, Return to Work and Managing Sickness Absence
- Moving goods Safely and Workplace Transport in Logistics Company HQs, Pallet hubs, and Road Haulage.
- Falls in Facilities Management Companies
- Slips in contract Cleaning Companies
- Backs Campaign nationwide in early 2008 when an **Upper Limb Disorder (ULD) Tool** would be launched.

Paul commented that that HSE found a range of performances from very good in some Pallet Hubs to poor in some bad premises and went on to say: -

- Fatalities were down on last year, but
- An increase in Hand Arm Vibration cases had been reported
- Knowledge of Asbestos, and the duty to manage it, was still very variable
- Legionella control was still not good enough – an outbreak occurred in Dudley
- The Standard of Risk Assessment was still poor – they need to be appropriate and more meaningful, with less emphasis on paperwork! Many were trivial, with a mass of irrelevant rubbish!
- Machinery accidents were possibly increasing – particularly on drilling work with a potential for serious accidents

Looking forward, Paul said that New Inspection Topics would be developed from a fine-tuning Review of HSE work activities. The inspections would concentrate on the Fit3 themes but would also deal with “Matters of Evident Concern” (MECs) if seen. Paul explained that MECs are situations with a potential for multiple injuries or serious health risks, when there is a need to proactively question about specific issues. Examples are: -

- **Fire and Explosion** (LPG storage & pipework, flammable solids, dust, means of escape, stoving and evaporating ovens etc.)
- **Health** (Stress, Legionella, metalworking fluids, confined spaces)
- **Structural Safety** (condition of buildings, cast-iron support columns)
- **Pressure Vessels** (Steam boilers, autoclaves)

Paul added that HSE were about to start a programme of visits to registered users of cooling towers, which would continue into the next work year. Machinery safety issues would also be pursued if observed during visits. The workplan would also concentrate on Injury Reduction in the following areas: -

- **Slips, Trips and Falls from height** – Building/Plant maintenance, food industry,
- **Slips & Trips** – Cleaning contractors; professional kitchens in schools, colleges, education, care homes and prisons.
- **Moving Goods Safely** – Transport routemap
- **Noise and Vibration** – Manufacturing, health surveillance

There was also a similar workplan for Disease Reduction: -

- **Local Exhaust Ventilation (LEV) Control Standards** – Major LEV project in the Midlands into standards of design, use and maintenance in Rubber, foundries, steel fabrication, welding, Motor Vehicle Repair (MVR), Metal Working Fluids (MWF)
- **Asbestos** – continue awareness campaign and enforcement of Duty to Manage.
- **Dermatitis** – Printing, Metalworking, food (“Avoid, Protect, Check”)

Paul went on to say that other elements of the Workplan included: -

- **Fairgrounds** – revised guidance to be issued, including a schedule of Non-destructive Testing Standards.
- **Gas Safety** – continued awareness campaign on Carbon Monoxide risks.
- **Migrant & vulnerable workers** – Working with the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA)

The Midlands would be carrying out special investigations into: -

- Standards for managing H &S in care homes
- LEV Standards would be expanded to all relevant issues.
- Legionella work would include a mapping exercise.

Paul added that this would be a process of Evolution NOT Revolution! He concluded by mentioning the imminence of the Corporate Manslaughter and corporate homicide Act 2007 and the BHSEA one-day Seminar in June. The HSE will work with the Police who will lead any prosecution on this legislation.

Members' Questions

Bob Cole of Morgan Est asked what the accident results were in the midlands and Paul replied that fatalities were much lower, although Major injuries were similar to last year.

Gerry Mulholland of Laing O'Rourke about the relationship between HSE and Police on the Corporate Manslaughter Act and Paul said that it was not yet understood consistently in all forces.

Mark Hoare of Birmingham University enquired about the number of HSE Inspectors in the Region. Paul replied that there were eight Inspectors and HSAOs to cover Birmingham, Solihull, Dudley and Coventry.

Jim Curran of Curran Webb Ltd. asked for Paul's opinion about the merits of the proposed ULD Tool against the existing Manual Handling Assessment Chart (MAC). Paul said that the MAC was an effective technique but he did not have any information on how effective the ULD Tool could be. Jim added that he thought the HSE Website was an excellent source of guidance and Paul added that HSAOs demonstrated the use of it during their visits.

Ed Friend of E.L.Friend Ltd. asked, in the light of increasing machinery accidents, if the number of inspections to SMEs was significant and how the number of Inspectors was related to Accident Prevention. Paul answered that HSE used accidents as a spur to inspect SMEs.

George Allcock of GKN plc, asked what the inspection policy was with regard to large companies. Paul replied that there were central contacts with big companies and that it was in their commercial interests to improve the safety performance of SMEs in their supply chain.

Mark Hoare asked about how Stress Inspections were carried out. Paul said that HSE looked at the stress produced by organisational structures. **John Wood of FPA** commented that Insurance Companies looked out for stress and **Ed Friend** added that he thought it could be a potentially large workload for HSE.

As there were no other questions, the Chairman closed the meeting by thanking Paul for his thought provoking presentation and asked members to show their appreciation in the usual manner.