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HELA

Progress with the development of the HSE Strategy

A paper by Peter Buckley

Issue

1. At its meeting on 3rd March 2008, HELA asked to be informed of progress with the development of HSE's strategy.

Recommendation

2. That HELA notes the contents of the paper.

Background

3. Work on developing a new strategy for the health and safety system of Great Britain began earlier this year. The work has been overseen by a Programme Board on which Derek Allen represented the Local Authorities. LACORS Policy Forum has also been kept up to date on developments.

Argument

4. The draft strategy – which is currently being worked upon by a copy writer – has the overall aim of preventing death, injury and ill-health due to work or as a result of work activities. Under that overall aim sit seven strategic themes:

- leadership
- competence
- worker involvement and consultation
- safer and healthier workplaces
- prevention of low frequency high impact events
- small businesses
- health and safety in the broader context of Government policy.

5. A little more detail on each of these themes can be found in the attached extract from a recent speech made by the Chair of HSE, Judith Hackitt (Annex 1).

6. The current plan is to launch a strategy for comment in the first week in December. During the normal 12 week consultation period, events will be

arranged around the country with key stakeholder groups, including Local Authorities, with two specific purposes. First to seek views on how the version of the strategy out for comment might best be strengthened. Second, to begin the dialogue with key stakeholders on what they might contribute to the delivery of the strategy.

Action

HELA to note the progress to date.

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ANNEX 1

Extract from Speech by Judith Hackitt

Our plan is to launch the strategy formally in early December and at that time we will initiate a consultation process which will enable stakeholders to comment. But we want stakeholders to do more than comment – we are particularly keen to engage in dialogue not only on what HSE can or should be doing but also to identify the key active roles which we need others to take to deliver the strategy.

Between now and December we still have a lot of work to do to refine the strategy and more importantly to start to define the delivery process and HSE's key roles in delivery.

The strategy will not be revolutionary but it will set out to optimise the performance of the overall health and safety system. It will clarify the roles of the regulated, the regulator, the workforce and the many others who are part of the system.

We will emphasise the importance of leadership – from the top of every organisation starting with the Boards and individual directors. We will place leadership at the heart of what we see as the overriding strategic aim – the prevention of death, injury and ill health to those at work and those affected by work activity.

There will be a strong focus on a proportionate approach – by dutyholders in being pragmatic and sensible in their approach to risk management, by health and safety professionals in giving competent advice which takes account of the need to encourage a common sense approach – competent professionals do not call for risk elimination.

We will make it clear that worker involvement and consultation is important in every organisation – where trades unions are present and where they are not and in all organisations irrespective of their size or dispersal of work locations.

Every organisation is different and the risk profile will vary from one organisation to another. To reduce the toll of work-related injury and ill health we need to improve our ability to focus on priorities – whether by industry, by sector or by individual issue. We need every organisation to take ownership of the process to identify its own risk profile. That prioritising process must also recognise and distinguish health and safety and the different approaches which will be required to address the precursors of both.

One obvious example of risk profiling is in the case of industries which have the potential to cause significant harm including to the public via low frequency but high impact incidents. These industry sectors make a major contribution to GB plc and we will work with them on how to put programmes in place that manage their particular risks effectively and also the business activities to continue to succeed.

We will also continue to put effort into those sectors which continue to carry a high risk and higher actual occurrence of serious injuries and fatalities. Because they carry well known risks cannot be an excuse for continued performance which is out of line with what other sectors manage to achieve. We may well need to pilot new ways of addressing these persistent areas of concern.

Small businesses will continue to be a major component of the British economy. We will work with the SME community to help them understand how to comply with health and safety law in a way which is proportionate to the risks of their business and which gives those businesses greater confidence to take decisions for themselves within a goal setting framework.

HSE and its partners in Local Authorities will focus on key activities to ensure that dutyholders manage their workplaces to assure health and safety of the workforce and the public where they are affected by work. Those activities will include

- providing advice and guidance on what the law requires
- taking appropriate enforcement action where there have been breaches of the law
- alerting dutyholders to new and emerging risks as they are identified.

We will also clarify the role of Health and Safety in delivering the broader Government agenda with particular reference to other regulation, Health Work and Wellbeing, Better Regulation and education of future generations in understanding risk.

The challenge of course will be to maintain focus on improving health and safety performance but balance that with taking into account wider issues which impact on health and safety where it is sensible to do so.

As I have said, setting the strategic aims is a vital part of putting a strategy together but it is only part. Those aims will only become real when we have completed the next part of the process – defining how we deliver. That's what we will be working on between now and when we launch the strategy in December.

But in the meantime let me leave you with a vision of what I hope we can achieve:

- to regain widespread commitment and recognition of what real health and safety is about
- to encourage and motivate all those in the health and safety system to be clear about how they will contribute to delivery
- to resume the reduction in the number of accidents and cases of ill health
- to ensure that those who breach or ignore health and safety duties are appropriately held to account.