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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

SAFE AND HEALTHY WORKING: AN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICE FOR SMES IN SCOTLAND

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Issue

1. Inform the Commission of *Safe and Healthy Working*, a recently launched occupational health and safety service for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Scotland.

Timing

2. Routine

Recommendation

3. The Commission is asked to note the information provided.

Background

4. At the launch of *Securing Health Together* in Scotland in July 2000, the then Scottish Executive Minister for Health and Community announced that £3 million over three years would be ring fenced to deliver occupational health and safety services for SMEs. Subsequently, Scottish Ministers endorsed a report from a SME OH Implementation Group set up in 2001 to advise the Scottish Executive on action which might be taken through NHS Scotland to enhance occupational health services in workplaces, with particular reference to SMEs. The report identified two key aims for occupational health (OH) services:
 - To improve Scotland's health, enterprise and economy by giving all small and medium businesses and their workers equal access to confidential, high-quality information, advice and support, which empowers them to recognise and address occupational health and safety problems they are experiencing, particularly where

these relate to basic health and safety legal compliance, stress and musculoskeletal disorders.

- To improve Scotland's health enterprise and economy by working with Scotland's Health at Work, other relevant parties, to raise the awareness and prevalence of occupational health and safety policies in SMEs, particularly in respect of the potential to concurrently improve employee's health and well-being and company productivity.

5. The Scottish Executive recognises the importance of making improvements to health in the workplace if it is to improve the general health record in Scotland, which is poor by UK and European standards. The workplace is one of the four themes in the Executive's 'Health Improvement Challenge' and *Safe and Healthy Working* is a crucial part of the wider health agenda. Specifically, the scheme aims to fill the gap in provision for SMEs by helping employers and employees to identify and tackle workplace issues including stress, back pain, working with dangerous substances, disability and the particular hazards of lone working - fifty-one percent of the workforce is employed by 243,000 SMEs in Scotland, but more than 60% of these workplaces currently have little or no access to occupational health and/or safety provision.
6. The Scottish Executive recognises that more may need to be done. A short-life working group has been set up to help in coordinating existing work and to identify new and effective interventions that will promote healthier workplaces. The initiative is a good example of the interface of devolved and reserved issues and HSE is liaising closely with the Scottish Executive on the work, which could have important implications for the HSC/E programme to develop a national occupational health and safety support system.

Development of the service

7. Health Scotland, formerly Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS), were asked by Scottish Ministers to appoint a SME occupational health co-ordinator to manage and organise the development of the OH service, which NHS Chief Executives agreed should be delivered through a three region structural approach.
8. Health Scotland invited a number of key players in the fields of occupational health, health and safety, health promotion, environmental health, and rehabilitative services to join them as members of a National Advisory Group to scope, define, steer and contribute to the development of the service. Bodies represented included Edinburgh Trade Union Centre, Federation of Small Businesses, HSE, Local Authority Environmental Health, Job Centre Plus, Scottish Executive, STUC, NHS Boards and professional groups.
9. Work was progressed through a National Advisory Group and a series of sub-groups to develop a communications strategy, training programme for advisors, distinctive and memorable brand, marketing strategy, recruitment exercise, quality assurance and evaluation.

Description of the Service

10. *Safe and Healthy Working* was launched on 27th May 2003. The service aims to give all SME employers and their workers equal access to free and confidential advice, information and support on occupational health and safety in the workplace (see Annex 1).

11. *Safe and Healthy Working* includes:

- A freephone advice line (0800 019 2211) providing confidential advice and guidance to employers, employees and individuals at the time of call. This aspect of the service was developed from the pilot occupational health and safety telephone helpline in Lanarkshire, which was funded by HSE.
- Professional advisers, based within NHS Boards, who, if requested, can visit the workplace to carry out an assessment and provide a report on the occupational health and safety needs of an organisation.
- An interactive website (www.safeandhealthyworking.com) that not only provides in-depth information and signposting to other relevant organisations (including HSE) and services, but also has a facility for organisations to input queries and questions to the advisors and receive a response via e-mail or telephone.

12. Initial results for June, July and August show that there have been over 800 interactive calls, over 200 workplace visits, and over 40,000 hits on the website

Emerging lessons

13. There are a number of lessons that are now emerging from the process of developing and evaluating *Safe and Healthy Working*, from which HSE can benefit in identifying and implementing steps toward a national occupational health and safety support system. Examples are set out below:

- Ministerial interest and commitment is essential - for the Scotland initiative this was an important driver in getting the key partners together.
- Do not underestimate the preparatory work and time needed to involve the key players, decide on the type and of the service to be provided, and set up structures for managing and delivering the service. For *Safe and Healthy Working*, this process took approximately eighteen months and had a significant impact on spend profiles.
- Clear objectives are necessary for putting in place effective evaluation arrangements. Beginning this process before the service rolls out facilitates the identification of the data required for monitoring the impact of the service.

Consultation

14. HSE Scotland

Presentation

15. None

Costs and Benefits

16. Costs of the scheme are borne by the Scottish Executive. Lessons from the evaluation provide a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the reach, results and impact of the service on SME employers and workers in Scotland as generated by initial investments in staff, advertising, publicity, telephone advice line and website.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

17. HSE has contributed £50K towards the evaluation of the service. In addition, HSE sits on the Evaluation Sub-group and the National Advisory Group. FOD Scotland has helped to train the regional advisers and is actively supporting the service locally. For example, regional advisers have been involved in recent agricultural safety awareness days. This activity has been managed within current resources.

Environmental Implications

18. None

Other Implications

19. The lessons learnt from the development of *Safe and Healthy Working* and the results of the evaluation will contribute to thinking on the steps towards a national occupational health and safety support system. We will put a paper to the Commission's 11th November meeting on this topic.

Action

20. The Commission is asked to note the information provided.