

Health and Safety Commission Paper		HSC/04/138	
Meeting Date:	7 December 2004	Open Gov. Status:	Fully Open
Type of Paper:	Above the line	Paper File Ref:	
Exemptions:			

HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

Communications strategy for the new OEL framework

A Paper by Michael Topping

Advisor(s): Tony Gissane

Cleared by Steve Coldrick on 30 November 2004

Issue

1 The communications strategy for the new OEL framework.

Timing

2 Routine.

Recommendation

3 The Commission:

- approve the developing communications strategy for the new OEL framework at Annex A; and
- note the proposal to develop a communications strategy for the chemicals programme.

Background

4 Following consultation, a below the line paper (HSC/04/06) was on the agenda for the 9 November 2004 meeting. The paper sought Commissioners approval of the revised COSHH Regulations, ACoP, the list of Workplace Exposure Limits (WELs), their numerical values, definitions and calculation methods. At the 9 November meeting, Commissioners requested the opportunity to discuss the communications strategy for the new OEL framework.

5 Changes to the COSHH Regulations to implement the new approach and WELs will be combined with those needed to implement the Cement Directive in a single set of amended Regulations. But the changes in respect of cement are expected to come in to force on 17 January 2005 (HSC/04/89), while the changes relating to OELs and other minor amendments will not come into force until 6 April 2005.

6 The ACTS subgroup on the OEL framework considered a draft communication strategy at its meeting on 4 October. Further development of the strategy will be taken forward in consultation with the Community of Practice and Interest (COPI) on

communicating information on hazardous substances. This group has stakeholder representatives, including ACTS members, and will liaise with ACTS.

Argument

7 Research shows that the majority of SMEs are unaware of the COSHH regulations and OELs. We do not need to communicate the changes to this audience. There is, of course, a need to make these firms aware of their duty to follow good practice and adequately control chemicals. A communications strategy for making all stakeholders aware of the need to properly control chemicals is being developed as part of the chemicals programme within the health and safety hazards programme.

8 This paper focuses on the need to ensure stakeholders familiar with the current OEL framework are aware of the changes. This is particularly important as we had an open debate in the development of the framework and there have been a number of changes to the original proposals. We need to do this without delay to prevent confusion. Thus the developing communications strategy at Annex A focuses primarily on communicating the changes to those familiar with the current system:

- Health and safety professionals;
- Safety representatives;
- Trade unions; and
- Trade associations

9 It contains key messages, the revised publications HSE will be publishing when the changes are implemented and an emerging communications strategy.

Consultation

10 The communications strategy at Annex A has been developed with social partners, HSE Communication Delivery Service and Press Office.

11 HSE met with the Chemical Industries Association on 22 November 2004 to update them on the proposals and discuss working together on COSHH guidance in time for the introduction of the new framework. HSE will continue to work closely and coordinate efforts with partners such as:

- Chemical Industries Association;
- Trade Unions;
- Institution of Occupational Safety and Health;
- British Occupational Hygiene Society;
- Confederation of British Industry.

Presentation

12 The proposals are in keeping with HSC's new strategy for the health and safety system in Great Britain. This recognises the need for the development of effective intervention strategies that will result in a reduction in occupational exposure to chemicals, and a consequent improvement in occupational health.

Cost and Benefits

13 Work on producing the guidance to support the new framework and to publicise it coming into force has been included in the respective workplans of the staff involved.

14 The benefits of the communications strategy for the new OEL framework will be increased understanding and compliance with the COSHH Regulations. The benefits of the framework are a new approach that will contribute to health protection by providing a practical, easy to use tool to help dutyholders improve standards of control of substances hazardous to health.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

15 See paragraph 13.

Environmental implications

16 None.

Other implications

17 None.

Action

18 The Commission:

- approve the developing communications strategy for the new OEL framework at Annex A; and
- note the proposal to develop a communications strategy for the chemicals programme.