

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT TO THE HSC

04 Sept 2006

1. Offshore Statistics

On the 31st August, HSE published safety statistics for the offshore industry during 2005/06. The figures show that two workers were killed and 50 suffered major injuries. This compares to no fatalities and 48 major injuries in 2004/05. However, the combined fatal and major injury rate decreased by 11 per cent to 225.4 per 100,000 workers compared with 253.4 in 2004/05. This improvement is explained by the 21 per cent rise in the number of people working offshore.

There has also been a small downward trend in the over 3 day injuries. However, we believe that the industry still has much to do, and HSE staff are working closely with them to achieve this.

2. Sensible Risk launch

On the 22nd August, Bill Callaghan launched the sensible risk principles with support from Jonathan Rees at a children's sailing centre. The launch promoted the case for focussing on practical steps to protect people from real harm, not bureaucratic back-covering. The launch was organised and managed by HSE's own staff; the involvement of TV presenter and adventurer, Ben Fogle, enabled us to get very good media coverage, particularly from the Broadcast media. The story was covered by BBC national TV and Radio, The Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail and the Sun amongst many others.

A very broad coalition of support for the principles was achieved in advance of the launch; we believe that a joint approach is necessary to gain the attention we want for real risks. Early indications are that the launch is welcomed by HSE's own staff; they are being invited to think about and comment upon the principles as well as the actions that HSE as a whole, and they as individuals, can take to support them.

3. Stoke Mandeville

On 24th July the Healthcare Commission published a report of their investigation into outbreaks of *Clostridium difficile* at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. The report attributes the deaths of 33 patients to infection by *Clostridium difficile* acquired during their stay at the Hospital.

HSE met with Thames Valley Police and the Crown Prosecution Service on 3rd August and agreed that the Healthcare Commission report presents findings that warrant investigation. The Work-Related Death Protocol has been invoked and there is a joint determination for close collaboration in evidence gathering and for HSE to provide its specialist expertise.

Progress by Thames Valley Police has been necessarily delayed by their operations in High Wycombe in connection with recent alleged terrorist plot, but resources are now being mustered and meetings with the Coroner and the Healthcare Commission are being arranged.

4. Q Fever outbreak in Stirlingshire

HSE was notified of an unusually high level of illness in the workforce at the Scotbeef slaughterhouse in Stirling on Friday, 14 July. NHS Scotland began an investigation, and confirmed on Wednesday 19 July that several workers had contracted the zoonose Q fever. This disease is caused by a bacterium carried by sheep and cattle, and usually causes mild general illness, such as chills and headaches in humans. It can, on rare occasions, cause serious illness or death. HSE inspectors are working with the NHS team, and have made site visits to the slaughterhouse. HSE issued an improvement notice requiring a risk assessment and action plan for zoonoses; the company has accepted this and continues to co-operate well.

Update 25 August 2006: the number of confirmed cases of Q Fever is now 93; the initial figure was 29, rising to 54 in early August. The testing regime is ongoing. This is now a significant outbreak, having exceeded the UK average for annual Q fever outbreaks (70) in a single event. There has been minimal reporting of this outbreak to date.

5. Anthrax outbreak

Members will have seen on the news that there has been an anthrax case in the Borders. Decontamination of the house by a US specialist company this week may prove newsworthy and all relevant Press Officers have been liaising. The lead remains with the Borders Health service but HSE has a major role in the pre-planning and risk assessment for the decontamination.

Commissioners may be interested to note that use by Borders NHS of the Anthrax Order to secure the premises was ultra vires as no animals were involved, leaving HSE to invoke Section 20 of the Health And Safety At Work Act as the only available legal mechanism to control access to the property.

6. Workplace Health Connect

The number of workplace visit referrals is now at 1,473, approximately 120% of target. The continuing high numbers need to be managed down so that the Pathfinders are not overwhelmed and to ensure that we stay within the 2006/07 budget allocation. Whilst Pathfinders are currently operating at the upper limits of capacity there has been no significant degradation of performance. There have been 2,806 calls to the Adviceline.

Independent evaluators, the Institute of Employment Studies, have produced a preliminary progress report detailing the first four months. The early findings are extremely positive. The service is well received by SME employers and the suggestion is that it is appreciated because it is free, credible and does not adopt a punitive approach.

Expenditure on Workplace Health Connect will be reduced by £1M over the life of the project. The Workplace Health Delivery Team is working on the operational model with a view to increase value for money and efficiency.

9. HSE's Finances

As the Commission knows from my note of 2 June, HSE planned to and did spend strongly in 2005/06 - to kick-start its health and safety intervention programmes. The size of the forward commitment began to grow too quickly and the Board has now taken action to rein it in somewhat to live within HSC/E's three year settlement (2005/06 to 2007/08). HSE is now budgeting to reduce staff levels by 250 to 350 posts by 31 March 2008 by natural wastage and a small programme of voluntary early retirements. The impact will be managed through greater efficiency and dropping lower priority work. The majority of the reduction is being made in uncommitted budgets in the areas of paid publicity, lower priority extra-mural research and by not proceeding with a sixth Workplace Health Connect pilot scheme. Some further financial and recruitment controls have been put in place.

These changes were discussed with the Trades Unions before they were announced to staff in early August. Looking forward, early discussions have begun for the next Spending Review period (2008 – 2011) between HSE and DWP primarily about our current performance and budgets.

GEOFFREY PODGER
SEPT 2006

ANNEX TO CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT: Sept 2006

Management

- The latest staffing figures are attached at Annex 3. The overall staffing position (HSE & HSL) fell by 38 from 1 July. While this is the largest monthly reduction for some time, 19 were agency staff and this is consistent with the recently announced policy of generally phasing out such staff by the end of September. The total inspector number fell by 9. The reasons for exit were routine. Given the constraints recently placed on inspector recruitment a downward trend is likely to continue.
- The HSE Board met on 2 August and took the second of a series of papers dealing with significant health and safety risk areas - MSD; discussed the content of the first HSC Performance Report due to be published in November; began a debate on the Board's appetite for better managing HSE's corporate business risks; explored some options for increasing HSE's income from charging; and discussed a report on how better to get the right information to the right people at the right time.

Construction

- HSC's Construction Industry Advisory Committee has set up an industry led steering group to lead on creating guidance documents to support the revised Construction (Design and management) regulations, due to come into force in April 2007.

Putting the record straight

- In August Steve Coldrick responded to a letter in Construction News on asbestos; Geoffrey Podger responded to a Sunday Telegraph article on asbestos; Jonathan Rees responded to a letter in the Independent complaining about HSE's 'merciless torrent of new regulations'; and Justin McCracken wrote in response to a Daily Telegraph article making it clear that HSE employed 9 press officers not 58.

Operations

22 fatalities were reported to HSE during August. Brief details are given in Annex 2.

Events and campaigns

- The 2006 Better Backs Campaign will run from October and will include workplace inspections, mass media advertising and events. The campaign will aim to reduce the incidence of back pain caused or made worse by work, its impact and the number of working days lost due to back pain.

- Asbestos – Don't take the gamble: a communications campaign that will run through September and October 2006 and will be launched by Bill Callaghan on 7 September at the CIEH conference.
- Safer Communities campaign is an initiative to make sustainable improvements in safety and health by working in partnership with groups such as LA/HSE, local businesses, employer/employee organisations, emergency services, the working community and those that govern the community. 'Health and Safety Town Week' 18-22 September will take place in Sunderland.
- Health and Safety Best Practice Exchange: following its first successful event BSC is holding a second event in Stockport on 5 September supported by HSE.
- Reducing absenteeism in the public sector conference: a case study-based event for all public sector professionals interested in their employees' well-being. Key note speech by Bill Callaghan.
- National Business Awards include a HSE Health and safety Award where the judges will be looking for the organisation with a good health and safety record that demonstrates that health and safety is an integral part of its management processes. The finalists will be announced on 30 August.

Consultations

Current consultations

- Globally Harmonising Systems of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) – invites comments to inform the UK government response to a European Commission draft regulation that will bring the current EU system in line with the UN GHS. Consultation ends 21 October 2006
- Work at Height (Amendment) Regulations – proposals for the way the regulations will apply to those paid to lead or teach others in climbing or caving activities. Consultation ends 31 October 2006
- Proposals to implement the second list of indicative occupational exposure limit values (European Directive 2006/15/EC). Ends 27 September 2006.
- Managing workplace transport risk – a route map. Consultation ends 22 September 2006

Closed consultations

- Welsh Language Scheme for HSE : ended 17 August
- Improving worker involvement – improving health and safety. Ended 8 September

Forthcoming regulations due to commence on 1 October

The change to the Workplace Exposure Limit for respirable crystalline silica from 0.3mgm⁻³ to 0.1mgm⁻³ will be implemented by amendment to HSE's booklet '*EH40 – Workplace Exposure Limits*'.

Amendments to mining law and ACoPs removing age restrictions to comply with the requirements of a European Employment Directive.

ANNEX 2

FATALITIES REPORTED TO HSE DURING AUGUST

AGE	INDUSTRY SECTOR	DESCRIPTION
16	Agriculture	DP fell 6m through a skylight
36	Waste	DP was crushed and trapped by press head
43	Manufacturing	DP was working under a vehicle when the jack gave way
56	Parcel/distribution	DP was hit on head by a metal bar
71	Services	Died from head injury
16	Agriculture	Found with the ATV over turned on him
67	Agriculture	Struck by a bull
51	Ship building/repair	DP died of fatal head injuries
30	Animal feedstuffs	Died inside a silo
42	Domestic	DP fell from the flat roof
73	Construction	DP fell approx 6.5m
38	Public services	DP drowned while swimming in the pond
N/A	Agriculture	Trapped between front end loader and bonnet
55	Plant hire	DP fell from the top of the double stacked units
59	Food	DP suffered serious chlorine inhalation
46	Telecomms	DP fell from pole
N/A	Highway maintenance	DP's vehicle mounted hired cherry picker collapsed while working on overhead light fitting
N/A	Education	DP died from legionellosis
61	Agriculture	DP fell through a fragile roof
85	Agriculture	Tree fell onto DP
44	Industrial tyre fitting	Struck by flange ejected from a hydraulic truck tyre
57	Construction/painter/Decorator	DP fell through roof

ANNEX 3

¹ **Table 1a: Total Staff Numbers: 1 April 1999 to 1 December 2005**

	Staff in Post									
	1 Apr 99	1 Apr 00	1 Apr 01	1 Apr 02	1 Apr 03	1 Apr 04		1 Apr 05	1 Aug 05	1 Dec 05
² Total Staff (HSE & HSL)	3,880	3,937	4,081	4,282	4,162	4,019		3,903	3,972	4,015
³ Total Visiting Staff	1,269	1,306	1,335	1,458	1,508	1,551		1,517	1,583	1,566
Total Inspectors	1,497	1,507	1,534	1,625	1,651	1,605		1,530	1,581	1,565
Other Professional/Specialist Staff	1,244	1,311	1,333	1,461	1,481	1,359	⁴	1,372	1,388	1,439
Other Staff	1,139	1,119	1,214	1,196	1,030	987		889	904	885

¹ **Table 1b: Total Staff Numbers 2006/07**

	Staff in Post					
	1 Apr 06		1 Jun 06	1 Jul 06	1 Aug 06	
	(Includes staff transferred to ORR on 1 Apr – (For comparison only)	(Excludes staff transferred to ORR on 1 Apr)				
² Total Staff (HSE & HSL)		3,991	3,811	3,784	3,793	3,755
³ Total Visiting Staff		1,543	1,442	1,437	1,438	1,434
Total Inspectors		1,543	1,444	1,455	1,459	1,450
Other Professional/Specialist Staff		1,470	1,429	1,427	1,426	1,429
Other Staff		856	824	797	801	768

Notes:

1. All figures are to full-time equivalents, rounded to the nearest whole, and from 2001 include agency, temporary staff and inward secondees.
2. Figures are as presented in HSC Annual Reports 1.4.99 to 1.4.06.
3. Total visiting staff includes operational inspectors and, from 1 April 2004, other visiting staff that support delivery of key health & safety messages (see table 2).
4. From 1.04.05 onwards, Other Professional / Specialist Staff figures have been reduced by the Total Visiting Administrative staff, as follows: 68 for 1.4.04, 113 for 1.4.05, 128 for 1.8.05, 126 for 1.12.05, 122 for shaded 1.04.06, 114 for unshaded 1.04.06, 105 for 1.6.06, 107 for 1.7.06, 108, 1.8.06. These staff are already included in the Total Visiting Staff line.
- 5 Figures at 1.04.06 include staff who transferred to the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) on that date - when responsibility for rail regulation health and safety matters transferred from HSE to ORR. Inclusion will enable direct comparison with previous years' figures.