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HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

The HSE Board

Flu Preparedness

A Paper by Linda Varney

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Cleared by

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Issue

1. An update on HSE's preparedness and response to the threat of avian and pandemic flu within the UK.

Timing

2. Routine

Recommendation

3. The Board is requested to note the current position of HSE's preparedness to the threat of influenza in the UK, to agree we should review the guidance we currently publish, and to note Justin McCracken's willingness to act as Board sponsor for this work.

Background

4. Andrew Cottam's paper of 9 November 2005 set out the key areas for HSE (recirculated to Board members by Justin McCracken on 16 January 2006) - attached at Annex A for convenience. The scenarios we face have not changed but the number of human cases of avian flu has increased slightly with the recent outbreak in Turkey.

Current position of HSE's activities on flu

5. HSE's contribution to the UK's preparedness is being coordinated, between the key internal players, through the 'Flu Forum', with governance by a small SCS Group (Stewart Campbell, Marcia Davies and Terry Rose). Justin McCracken has agreed to bring any issues to the Board's attention, as necessary. Our internal business contingency planning for this topic is through the Business Continuity Group.

Coordination of HSE's activities is through cross-membership of the Flu Forum and the Business Continuity Group.

6. **Avian Flu:** this is likely to affect large numbers of birds, especially poultry, but probably small numbers of people. Mortality will, however, be high amongst those people affected. Defra is leading; HSE has advised on safety for farm workers, contractors and our own visiting staff. Our guidance has been well received by the Trade Unions and poultry industry. Hugh Robertson has passed on thanks from a numbers of Trades Unions who have found the briefing extremely helpful and practical and used as the basis for their own material. In the event of an outbreak involving birds Defra and the Scottish Executive have contingency plans in place.
7. **Human Pandemic Flu:** DH has the lead in providing advice on what to do in the case of human flu. There is material on its website and it has published a UK Contingency Plan. HSE has been working with DH, HPA, Cabinet Office and others on the workplace issues, including guidance for health care workers. We have also been working in partnership with industry to ensure vaccine production can be stepped up without compromising worker safety.
8. **HSE's Business Contingency planning:** The Board agreed a list of prioritised business functions at its meeting on 4 February 2004. Steve Dennis, Chair of the Business Continuity Group, wrote to Heads of Directorates on 6 January 2006 asking them to review the robustness of their contingency plan and take any necessary action to revise it by 28 February. The draft arrangements for managing the impact internally are attached at Annex B. They would be activated by DH's published trigger points for declaring a pandemic or by a regionally based outbreak that severely affected Bootle or London HQs.
9. **Testing of arrangements:** HSE is running its own exercises in order to test its response to the potential threat. A 'Table-Top' exercise to test our response to avian flu is planned for 20 February. Any significant issues that arise will be fed back to the Board.
10. Defra intends to run a cross-Departmental Exercise, on avian flu, on 5 and 6 April focusing on operational, tactical and strategic issues; HSE will be involved with this.
11. **Communications:** In the event of a pandemic, the Flu Forum will act as a communications hub on worker health issues and provide 'best' advice externally, involving Communications Directorate in this. Advice to our own staff will be given through our internal Continuity Management Team, with input from Andrew Cottam.
12. Media interest remains steady. Press Office have worked with other HSE staff to respond to any media interest on those areas within HSE's remit, as well as linking with other key players, eg HPA and Defra. Our guidance - 'Pandemic Flu: Workplace Advice' (available on the website) - has attracted some recent interest, in particular over the general advice that workers should stay at home if they are suffering from flu-like symptoms. This is in line with the DH position in the event of a pandemic but it is not always being placed in this context by the press. This may give some risk to our line on 'sensible' health and safety and others will review the wording of this guidance.

Consultation

13. This paper has been prepared with Andrew Cottam, Biological Agents Unit and Steve Dennis, BSD.

Presentation

14. HSE needs to be seen as continuing to provide credible advice in line with that from the lead Departments and provide input to cross-Government contingency planning. HSE planning needs to ensure that we can fulfil this role.

Costs and Benefits

15. N/A

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

16. There will be costs in maintaining HSE's business capacity, protecting key people and perhaps enabling distance working. This will be necessary to ensure HSE is able to provide the necessary contribution to cross-Government responses.

Environmental Implications

17. N/A

Other Implications

18. N/A

Action

19. The Board is asked to endorse the action being taken, in particular the approach to Business Continuity in Annex B, [and to advise of any further measures needed] [and to review the situation after the table top exercise].

INFLUENZA & HSE

Note by Andrew Cottam

Issue

20. HSE's preparedness and response to the threat of influenza (flu) within the UK.

Purpose

21. To:

- (i) outline the differing potential threats from avian and pandemic human flu;
- (ii) update Senior Managers on HSE's current and planned contribution to Government's response to the threat;
- (iii) identify HSE action in the event of an outbreak of either avian or human disease;
- (iv) for senior managers to note the arrangements put into place;
- (v) for the Board to keep these arrangements under review in the event of any significant developments.

Background

22. Public concern and media interest in the threat to human health from flu has increased significantly because of the spread of a highly pathogenic form of avian flu (called H5N1) into Europe. There is frequent confusion between avian flu and pandemic human flu – they are different diseases. The level of concern has been disproportionate to the current risk to human health, which at present is low.

23. Avian flu is a disease of birds, with the potential to devastate bird populations. Serious outbreaks of disease have been reported in many countries. In the UK the last major outbreak was in 1991, but it has been found very recently in a bird quarantine facility

24. Avian flu may affect people (and other animals), this is rare but can be serious. Current experience in the Far East is of fatality rates exceeding 50%, although the total number of human deaths remains low (60+). There is concern though, that this avian virus could change (reassort or mutate) to emerge as a new human flu virus to which few would have immunity and which could spread between humans giving rise to a global flu pandemic. Control of the disease in animals is an important measure in reducing the likelihood of pandemic flu in humans. However, human outbreaks do emerge independently of outbreaks in animals.

HSE's activities on flu

25. There are two main scenarios, with differing strategic and operational implications for us:

Scenario 1 - the disease appears in the UK bird population, but remains a disease of birds. This creates a low risk of infection to poultry workers and persons managing the outbreak, but would generate high levels of concern. This is currently the most probable scenario and could be realised in the very short-term, possibly within weeks.

Scenario 2 - pandemic flu emerges as a human disease and occurs in the UK. This would have significant economic and social impact, with implications for many work activities.

This is the scenario of greatest concern and is expected at some stage but may not be realised for years. A lead-in time, of weeks to months, before a pandemic is declared can be expected.

26. HSE is contributing to increasing the UK's resilience to flu by:

- Leading on worker protection issues, focussing at this stage on the agriculture and healthcare sectors;
- Contributing, as a 'Category 2 responder' (under the Civil Contingencies Act), providing advice and information centrally to other's initiatives;
- Facilitating critical infrastructure work, particularly vaccine production.

This is being done in close partnership with key players, particularly Department of Health (DH), Defra, Cabinet Office, Health Protection Agency (HPA), State Veterinary Service (SVS) and industry. The Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly Government are involved, but as much activity is focussed around Defra and DH, we aren't clear on the extent of GB-wide arrangements being adopted and understood in Wales and Scotland.

27. There is also a fourth 'internal' strand that is being addressed – advice to HSE visiting staff who may be involved in or around an outbreak of avian flu and HSE's own business continuity, particularly in the event of a human flu outbreak.

Response to Avian flu (Scenario 1)

28. The advent of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, coupled with the lessons learnt from the handling of the last Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) epidemic, has resulted in a good state of preparedness for avian flu. Areas of interest for HSE are:

- culling - will be mainly be by gassing with carbon dioxide, alternative approaches include 'necking' and lethal injection;
- carcass disposal – will mainly be at licensed incineration plants. Rendering may also be used. In remote locations small, local, pyres may be used;
- cleaning and disinfection – with possible exposure to toxic chemicals;
- transport, including loading/unloading of vehicles used to transport carcasses
- access issues, particularly working at height during cleaning and disinfection
- Contractors – Defra are being more proactive in controlling contractors. Selection has been rigorous and they will be subject to supervision by Senior Animal Health Officers. Safety Professionals from Defra and their Agencies will have a monitoring and audit function.

29. A 'Government & Industry Working Group on Worker Protection against Avian flu' (membership includes the SVS, DH, HPA, Defra, HSE, the British Poultry Council and the British Egg Industry Council) was set up to develop guidance for those working in the industry, but their advice is also relevant to others who may be exposed to the same kind of risk. This advice was published at the end of October.

30. HSE's Agriculture & Food Sector have:

- issued a briefing note to all inspectors on the current Government response;
- advised Inspectors to limit their visits to poultry undertakings (hatcheries, broiler units and egg producers) to complaint and accident investigation only;
- started work on detailed operational instructions, to be issued by 30 November.

A multi-agency 'roadshow', involving Defra, HSE Sector staff, SVS, HPA and industry associations will be visiting a number of locations from 24 November.

Response to Pandemic flu in Humans (Scenario 2)

31. This is primarily a public health issue. The amount of work taking place across government is considerable, HSE forms a small but key part of this and we have:

- been involved in tabletop exercises;
- advised on occupational issues, eg vaccination of key workers and port entry screening;
- developed draft generic guidance for workers;
- worked with DH/HPA on guidance on infection control for health care professionals and expect to be involved in similar work for 'closed' communities (care homes, prisons, etc);
- sought the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogen's advice on hazard classification of the various flu viruses. This is key to appropriate risk management controls being used in laboratory facilities. HSE has published this advice for laboratory workers.

32. Vaccine production is a critical part of the UK resilience planning for this scenario. HSE has been working closely with DH and industry to ensure that vaccines can be produced without compromising worker or environmental safety. Consents will be required for some of this work.

33. HSE will need to maintain business continuity in the event of an outbreak of pandemic human flu and the Business Continuity Group, chaired by Steve Dennis, is considering this. Areas for consideration are:

- the strategic positioning of HSE in the overall government response, ie our input on civil contingencies and the type, and level of operational activity (including meetings and visits) we expect to maintain;
- the identification and 'protection' of key HSE staff needed to deliver our commitments during an outbreak;
- staff health and safety and whom we ask to attend for work as normal;
- internal communications.

BSD will be making proposals to the Board shortly on these issues, including how top management controls and manages HSE during a human pandemic and the arrangements necessary to maintain the chain of command.

Key players in HSE

34. The parts of HSE currently involved are HID (SI4 Biological Agents Unit); Policy Group (SI5 Biological Agents and Genetically Modified Organisms Policy; SI3 Civil Contingencies; Health Services Unit and IR6 Agriculture and Food Sector), HSL and BSD. A 'flu forum', which I chair, has been set up to ensure effective communication and coordination between these key players and others who may need to be involved in planning and preparation. A FOD Operations representative will be included. In the event of an outbreak this forum will:

- act as a communications hub;
- provide 'best' advice internally and externally.

Governance of the 'Flu forum' is through a small SCS steering group, (Stewart Campbell, Marcia Davies and Terry Rose). In the event of a human flu pandemic, HSE's business continuity arrangements would be involved and overall control would pass to a member of HSE's top management. I will be joining the internal Business Continuity Group and Steve Dennis will join the 'flu forum' to ensure our plans are joined up.

Presentation

35. There is a high degree of public and media interest in the topic. This can only increase with the appearance of either avian or human flu in the UK. Other government departments and agencies appear to be clear about HSE's role and effective links have been established. Press Office and Infoline are briefed and HSE has information on its website.

36. In addition:

- The House of Lords Science and Technology Select committee begins work in November to review UK preparedness for flu pandemic.
- The EU Directive on 'Control of Avian Flu' is to be debated at a European Standing Committee on 30 November. Defra are leading but HSE is contributing.

Resource Implications for HSE

Work in this preparatory phase has been intensive but has fallen mainly on the Agriculture and Food Sector, Biological Agents and Genetically Modified Organisms Policy and HID (SI4 Biological Agents Unit). In the event of an outbreak the call on HSE would increase but the main demands are still likely to be focussed on key players.

Action

37. HSE has been proactive, linking into wider government work and coordinating internal work. Areas for further action are:

- (i) briefing HSE senior managers, including expectations in relation to Regional and Local Resilience Forums (8 November onwards). FOD Divisional Directors would normally be expected to act as HSE 'Gold' Command and specific briefing will be provided for them. It is likely that the Head of HID SI4 will act as 'Silver';
- (ii) developing and testing our internal arrangements, in the event of an outbreak, through internal 'table top' exercise(s). This should consider both scenarios, although avian flu is more pressing (target date - December). ;
- (iii) delivering more detailed internal instructions for visiting staff (target date - end November);
- (iv) deciding on our intervention strategy for contractors appointed to deal with an outbreak of avian flu;
- (vi) clarifying contingency arrangements in Scotland and Wales;
- (vii) reviewing our communications plans, including our links to those developed by agriculture and health departments; and
- (viii) continue to work with key research groups and vaccine manufacturers to provide a clear path through the regulatory framework (ongoing).

The 'Flu forum' will continue to provide an oversight of the topic and with the SCS Steering Group, will identify when action needs to be escalated to maintain HSE's position and reputation.

9 November 2005

ANNEX B

HSE SERVICE DISRUPTION – BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Note by Steve Dennis and Roger Watts

Background

1 This Annex sets out the main players and their responsibilities in managing a serious interruption to HSE's ability to deliver its business. It seeks to dovetail, take the same format and use some of the same facilities (e.g. the duty officer system) that are used to manage major health and safety incidents.

Argument

2 Briefly, the proposition is that where a major interruption is likely to or actually occurs – in this case a flu pandemic – the duty members of the Executive will declare it as such and invoke two teams. One team oversees the management of the event, the other to practically coordinate the restoration of priority services. The procedure seeks to distinguish between events that affect HSE nationally and those with geographically restricted impact, which it is proposed to manage locally.

3 If the Board is content with this approach the next steps will be to develop all the roles and responsibilities and supplement them with some practical 'action checklists'; ensure the necessary material and facilities are available for the two proposed national teams; and discuss with Regional Directors what assistance they may need in preparing for geographically restricted events.

Action

4 Is the Board content with this approach?

HSE SERVICE DISRUPTION - BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Introduction

This procedure describes how HSE will handle serious potential interruption to its business and to implement viable recovery strategies.

- Purpose
- Scope
- Definition
- Policy
- Invocation
- Roles and responsibilities
- Testing, monitoring and review
- Principles of business continuity planning

Purpose

This procedure applies to incidents that lead to potential interruptions of business through a framework of contingency plans under an overall command and control structure. This structure enables all directorates and divisions to address their contribution to these contingency arrangements and to develop solutions to meet their specific needs within the framework.

Scope

This procedure applies to any incident or event that seriously disrupts the day-to-day business of HSE. It does not address building evacuation procedures as these are covered separately.

Definition

A service interruption is an event causing disruption to the day-to-day business that can be widespread and affect the whole organisation e.g. national fuel strike or flu pandemic, or can affect a small or defined part of the organisation e.g. local power failure, fire. An event may impact solely on our internal processes, our outward facing dealings, or a mixture of both. There may be minor interruptions where it is known that services will be restored quickly and these will not be treated as formal business continuity events.

Policy

HSE recognises the potential operational and financial losses associated with a service interruption and the importance of maintaining viable contingency and recovery strategies. The response system needs to be effective and efficient and proportionate to the circumstances.

It aims to:

- Ensure the continuity of the business
- To have tested plans that, when invoked, will permit an efficient and timely recovery of the interrupted business operation

- Minimise the inconvenience and potential disruption to users and clients
- Prevent financial or operational impacts that could seriously jeopardise HSE
- Protect HSE's public image and minimise legal consequences
- Maximise the safety and security of staff and stakeholders

Invocation

[See BC command & control chart]

A business interruption will be reported to the duty member of the executive or regional/site incident manager. Depending on the circumstances of the incident and its severity on staff, site and services they will decide whether to invoke a full or local recovery process. Not all emergencies will result in every part of the recovery team being involved and in some circumstances the participants can work as a virtual team (using video, phone or email links).

During normal office hours any site emergency is reported through existing contact points and the designated duty member of the executive or regional/site incident manager notified accordingly. They will review the situation and likely impact and decide who to call together from the designated contact points.

For any time outside normal office hours the building managers and HSE duty officer will use established contact lists. It is the responsibility of those on this contact list to:

- Ensure their details are up to date
- Organise planned absences with others on the list
- Be prepared to react to an emergency at any HSE site

Roles and responsibilities

For individual ease of use, roles and responsibilities are arranged on separate pages for the following:

- National incident management – duty executive
- Director, Communications Directorate
- National Incident Recovery Manager (Business Continuity Manager)
- Head of OPSD
- Head of Specific Interventions Division
- Director, Personnel Division
- Regional/site incident manager
- Secretariat
- Chief Executive, HSL
- Estates Management (BSD) and Facilities Managers (FM's)
- BEU and REFIT
- Duty Officer
- Heads of Directorate/Division

HSE SERVICE DISRUPTION - BUSINESS CONTINUITY

National Incident Management, Duty Executive Responsibility

1 Whether the incident occurs in or out of normal office hours, the responsibilities are the same.

- A member of the Executive will be available for out-of-hours notifications
 - Duty member of the Executive decides if the incident is categorised as a major disruption and decide whether immediate action is necessary
- 2 When considering whether to declare a major event, the Duty Member will consider:
- The impact of the event in delivering key HSE work
 - The geographical coverage and impact on staff and whether it can be handled locally
 - Any response required under Major Incident or Civil Contingency plans
- 3 Once a major event is declared the Duty member:
- Determines whether a meeting of the National Incident Management Team (NIM) should be convened, this will depend upon the severity of the specific incident
 - Assembles the NIM Team and co-opts any additional members
 - Considers whether to utilise major incident suite and its secure communications
 - Ensures that contact with the Secretariat and all members of the Executive is maintained
 - Maintenance of the organisation's functions -takes decisions on work priority, what continues, what is resourced and what is not
 - Ensures that emergency services are involved where necessary and that staff are removed from harm
 - Ensures that contact is maintained with Major Incident or Civil Contingency response teams
 - Establishes internal and external communications and agrees messages for release and their timing (including with OGDs & TU)
 - Agrees the broad actions for restoration of services and oversee them (including Commission work)
 - Alerts the National Incident Recovery Team (NIR) leader to inform him/her of the details
 - Calls the NIR Team into action when necessary
 - Will have an appropriate handover to a replacement NIM Team leader if necessary during an extended emergency
 - Decides when the incident is over and formally closes the command and control structure
 - Establishes a review of the handling of the incident

4 In the event of an incident the Secretariat will resource a room and supply

- A pack of contact names with designated responsibilities
- Procedures
- A series of checklists to assist the management of the event
- Telecomm links

HSE SERVICE DISRUPTION - BUSINESS CONTINUITY

National Incident Recovery Manager (Business Continuity Manager)

1 Whether the incident occurs in or out of normal office hours, the responsibilities are the same.

- Ensures that there is a contact point for out-of-hours notification
- Ensures that a deputy has been nominated to take control in the event of unavailability
- Maintains communication with the duty member of the Executive who has taken the role of National Incident Manager

2 Once the duty member of the Executive has declared a major event

- Assembles the National Incident Recovery Team and identifies whether any additional topic
- Assesses the amount of outage time and number of critical business functions affected (national, regional and local services affected)
- Mobilises and co-ordinates the appropriate recovery teams to meet the level of support for the affected operations
- Calculates the perceived ongoing risk and/or exposure to the business operations
- Designates the equipment, premises and work-around options to be used in the emergency
- Assesses any employee issues at the affected site
- Identifies any health and safety issues related to recovery. Takes reports from the emergency services.
- Identifies the key/critical business processes and functions that need to have immediate attention
- Ensures that contact is maintained with the National Incident Management Team
- Makes sure there is an appropriate handover to a deputy in the event of an extended emergency
- Updates the National Incident Management Team on progress to recovery and informs them when recovery is completed
- Expedites any procurement, invoices, expenses and reports

3 In the event of an incident being notified the Departmental Security Officer will resource a room and supply

- A pack of contact details and designated responsibilities throughout HSE
- Procedures for handling incidents
- A series of checklists to assist the management and progressing of action
- Telecomm links
- Assemble the other team members

HSE Service Disruption - BC Command & Control (teams can be actual or virtual)

