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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CONIAC)

HSC's statement on worker involvement and consultation

Summary

HSC has published a new statement on worker involvement and consultation setting out principles to underpin how workers and employers can work together on health and safety.

Issue

1. To update members on the outcome of the Health and Safety Commission discussion, 13th January 2004, on the draft statement that sets out the principles and measures considered vital to help us to achieve our goal of securing greater worker involvement and consultation on occupational health and safety. The approach adopted in the statement is founded on the belief that it would be better to concentrate our resources on non-regulatory measures that will better assist us in reaching our goal.

Background

2. HSC agreed the statement on the 13th January. The HSC strategy places high importance to getting more workers involved in health and safety and with the statement announces a series of activities to deliver this key strategic aim.

Consultation

3. Many organisations were consulted on the statement and on publication HSE received and published endorsements from the TUC, CBI, IoD, Federation of Small Businesses, Chemical Industry Association, RoSPA, IOSH and other stakeholders.

Presentation

4. The statement was published on 3rd March 2004 and is currently on a new HSE website with case studies, endorsements from stakeholders and information about the WSA Challenge Fund at:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/involvement/index.htm>

Action

5. CONIAC members are invited to note:
 - The HSC statement on worker involvement attached to this paper at Annex 1.
 - Events to launch the statement and get further buy-in from stakeholders.
 - The principles of the statement to underpin more industry/sector specific statements on how to get more workers involved in health and safety.

Annex 1: A Collective Declaration on Worker Involvement

1. A statement of the Principle.

All workers have a right to work in places where all risks to their health and safety are properly controlled.

Workers who are encouraged to have a voice and are given the ability to influence health and safety are safer and healthier than those who do not. A universally involved and consulted workforce would be a major achievement and contribute to getting health and safety recognised as a 'cornerstone of a civilised society.'

An actively engaged workforce is fundamental to ensuring success of all other interventions on health and safety. It provides a 'reality check' for employers from the shop floor and helps ensure activities on health and safety lead to compliance.

These 'trust' relationships will build a shared vision of health and safety and if enough organisations encourage them they will reduce the overall need for regulatory intervention.

2. HSC strategy and worker involvement.

This declaration sets out our belief in involving even more workers in health and safety. It admits below the challenges that we face. These do not discourage us – they motivate us to succeed. There is evidence on the benefits of involving workers and we agree it shows what stands to be gained. And we say what we are going to do in a number of measures to improve health and safety by involving workers.

HSC's *Strategy for Workplace Health and Safety in Great Britain to 2010 and beyond* describes the vision – to gain recognition of health and safety as a cornerstone of a civilised society and, with that, achieve a record of workplace health and safety that leads the world. We agree an essential part of this vision is a workforce fully involved in health and safety management and a vibrant system of workplace health and safety representatives operating in partnership with management. This statement is the basis of our renewed impetus to encourage greater worker involvement and consultation and commits us to develop new ways to achieve it.

3. A statement of current challenges.

Great Britain has changed how it works. We acknowledge that changes to the labour market and the growth of small industries biased towards intellectual capital has led to the following situation:

- There are not enough employers who properly involve and consult their workers on health and safety.
- There are not enough workers who feel able to come forward and take on health and safety responsibilities.

With changes to work patterns there is now a danger of significant reductions in consultation with workers by employers on health and safety. It is our belief this reduction will eventually undermine work to improve health and safety and stop us from achieving our targets. We recognise that proportionate HSE/LA enforcement continues to have a role to play for achieving compliance on consulting the workforce on health and safety. The challenge now is to build on this role and ensure employers and the workforce finds new ways to develop trust and work together. We believe this is possible, that there is a desire to engage with workers and safety representatives and we welcome the opportunity to make it happen.

4. A statement of methods of worker involvement

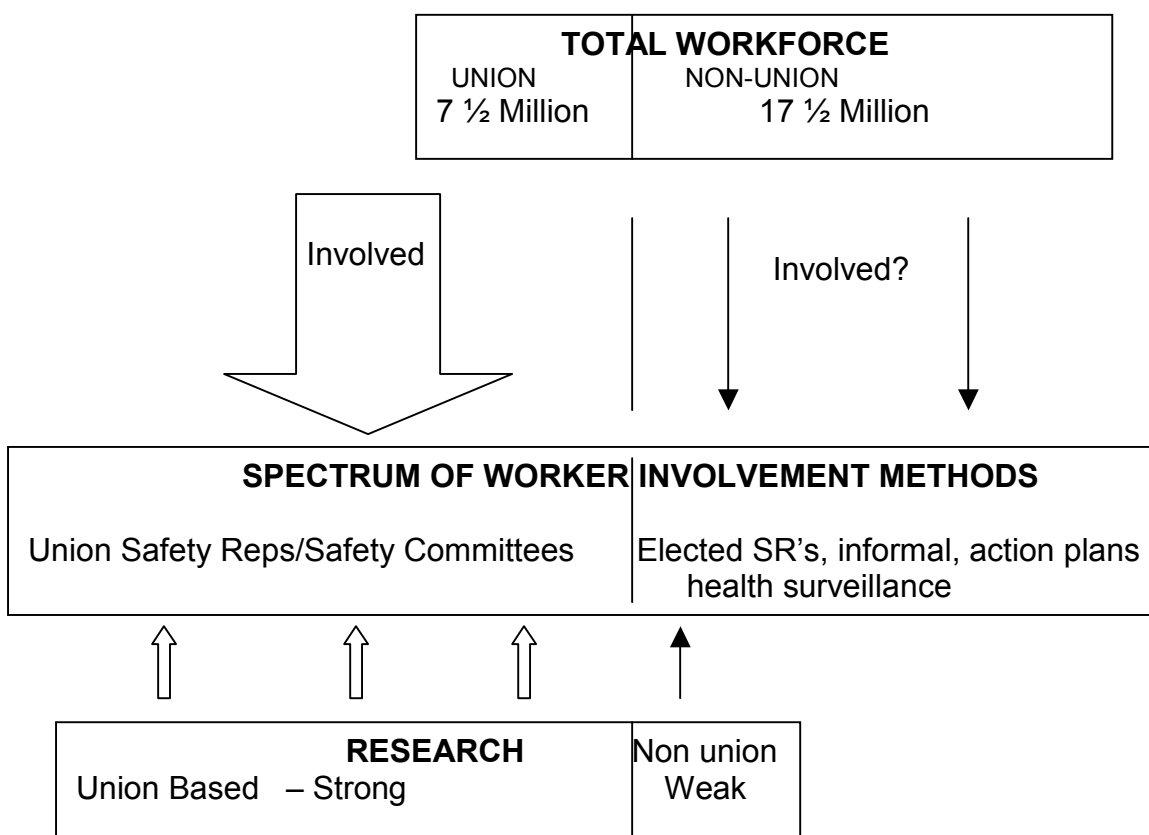
By involvement we specifically mean relationships between workers and employers based on collaboration and trust and nurtured as part of the management of health and safety. The most common and widespread arrangements are those relationships developed through trade union safety representatives and safety committees. Evidence outlined in section 5 makes clear that trade union safety representatives, through their empowered role for purposes of consultation, often lead to higher levels of compliance and better health and safety performance than in non trade union systems. We recognise this, support the invaluable contribution they continue to make to health and safety and want dialogue between us to continue and where possible expand into new areas.

However as we noted above many workers, particularly those working in small and medium sized organisations, may not belong to trade unions and do not have access to trade union safety representatives. So we need to encourage workers to want to get involved and we encourage various methods of involvement appropriate to different circumstances. Examples we support for getting involved include ownership by workers of action plans and risk assessments; arrangements for 'feedback' between workers and employers; works councils with dedicated health and safety meetings and honest, open and supportive safety cultures. We will encourage employers to ensure workers take part in health and safety and listen and respond to their opinions, views and advice.

5. A statement of evidence.

We believe the statement of principle is based on evidence. We also believe, as described in section 4, that there are different methods for how workers can be actively involved and consulted on health and safety which may be more appropriate in some of the organisations in existence today. Organisations should assess the goals they need to achieve to ensure good occupational health and safety and deploy the appropriate methods and techniques for worker involvement and consultation to achieve them.

There is an imbalance in the available evidence showing the impact of these ranges of methods and this can be summarised diagrammatically:



Within this large amount of research into the trade union impact there is evidence of the positive impact trade unions have on health and safety performance, particularly where health and safety hazards are overt, showing they “react by reducing injury rates”¹. There is further evidence that trade union safety representatives, through their empowered role in consultation “shows the strongest relationship with safety compliance”².

¹ Trade Unions and Industrial Injury in Great Britain, Adam Seth Litwin, LSE, Centre for Economic Performance, 2000.

² Safety Behaviour in the Construction Sector, HAS/HSE Northern Ireland by Nick McDonald and Victor Hrymak.

On the other end of the scale there is less evidence of successful methods of involvement and consultation in small businesses where trade unions are not recognised or are without safety representatives for any other reason. Historically research has not penetrated in these areas and our understanding of what works is limited here. Of course this is the business environment for most businesses and about half the workforce. We need to improve our understanding of what works best for small businesses and produce appropriate solutions that are soundly based on the evidence.

With the right commitment the principles of this statement can underpin a number of informal approaches for involving workers in health and safety. We believe evidence exists of initiatives that can inspire and be adopted by many different kinds of organisations. With the support and involvement of trade unions and their representatives, initiatives to reduce injuries and fatalities in the paper industry used a variety of methods for improving the management of health and safety. “Central to the initiative was the production of action plans by individual UK paper mills. These were implemented and monitored through the participation of both management and employees”³. The organisations that were by far the most successful and delivered the most dramatic reductions to injuries were those where workers discussed, contributed and took ownership of these action plans. We believe these lessons can be translated into many kinds of business environment.

The Worker Safety Adviser (WSA) Pilot was another good example of where partnerships between trade unions, employers and workers can lead to improvements in organisations that don't recognise trade unions. “Over 75% of employers reported that they had made changes to their approach to health and safety as a result of the pilot, including joint training for managers and workers, involving workers in risk assessments and controls and producing new or revised policies and procedures”⁴.

The available evidence and case studies, we believe, show the health and safety, social and business benefits of involving and consulting with the workforce.

³ The effectiveness and impact of the PABIAC initiative in reducing accidents in the paper industry. Greenstreet Berman Ltd, HSE, CRR 452/2002.

⁴ The Worker Safety Advisor (WSA) Pilot. York Consulting with Fife College of Further Education, HSE CRR 144/2003.

6. A statement of activities

There are number of activities that we will contribute to and that we believe will help us achieve our goal of getting more workers and employers working in partnership on health and safety.

In order to begin this programme of work we are committed to:

- Work to ensure training needs are identified and means to develop the competence of all workers and of safety representatives in particular are put in place and working well. We want an informed and knowledgeable workforce.
- Work with safety representatives to help them carry out their vital work. We will work together and encourage more workers to get involved in health and safety and set out the role of safety representatives.
- Support the WSA Challenge Fund for levering in improved consultation and for developing partnerships between representative bodies, workers, employers and training organisations.
- Promoting and, where appropriate, contributing to campaigns that encourage more workers to get involved in health and safety. In particular we will ensure, where appropriate, our public pronouncements draw attention to the importance of worker involvement and consultation.
- We will discuss with HSE and LAs the practical steps that could be taken to move this agenda forward. HSE has outlined a set of intervention strategies to be developed with LAs and we are pleased to see that these include working with safety representatives, trade unions and other organisations representing workers to support them in their roles.
- Acting upon research that identifies innovative solutions for getting more workers involved in and consulted on health and safety.
- Reviewing the success of these measures and contributing to monitoring and evaluating whether more workers are better involved in and consulted on health and safety.