

Speech by Bill Callaghan - The Future of Occupational Safety & Health in the EU

Opening remarks Liverpool – 18th October 2005

Welcome to this important conference, 'The Future of Occupational Safety and Health in the EU'.

And what better place for such a conference than Liverpool, a city that:

- in recent years has benefited from European funding to help regeneration;
- which will be the European Capital of Culture in 2008,
- I was going to say that one of its football team currently holds the European Championship, but as there is more than one team in Liverpool I have to be careful of what I say.
- Liverpool is also the main headquarters of HSE, where 1,400 of our staff work.

A few domestic issues before the conference gets underway. Please make a note of the location of Fire Exits, and please avoid leaving bags where they could be a tripping hazard. The fire alarm sounds a continuous alarm. In the event of this happening please leave the hotel immediately by the nearest fire exit. Do not stop to collect personal belongings. Once outside, make your way to the guest assembly point at the front of the hotel.

Bilingual staff are available at the registration desk throughout the day should you need assistance. They and other staff helping to run the event are wearing red lanyards.

All Plenary sessions in the programme will take place in this room, Princes Suite 1 and the breakout sessions scheduled for 13.50 – 14.50 will take place as marked in either this room or the adjacent rooms, as marked on your ticket.

So, to the conference.

How do I see 'The Future of Occupational Safety and Health in the EU'?

I would like to see occupational safety and health at the heart of Europe, at Commission, member state, sector and enterprise levels. In the UK, we have a vision to gain recognition of health and safety as a cornerstone of a civilised society.

Today's conference and the meeting tomorrow can help ensure that safety is a cornerstone of a civilised European society.

Considerable progress has already been made through recent Presidencies, which I would like to thank them for on behalf of the UK, and further progress is needed through our Presidency and those that follow us. The European Commission is also crucial to driving this work forward and I am grateful to the Commission for its support in staging this event.

Putting occupational health and safety at the heart of Europe is a huge challenge, but we, whether as regulators, or enforcers, or practitioners, or employers, or workers and their representatives, we all need to continue to make a coherent and compelling case for the benefits of sensible health and safety.

Working more in partnership will help achieve this goal. But partnerships need to be appropriate for the task in hand; for example:

- Between the social partners at the workplace;
- health and safety organisations working with health service providers to ensure proper occupational rehabilitation;
- health and safety organisations working effectively across government to mainstream health and safety.

Flexible use of a range of methods and tools is needed to take account of the risks of particular sectors [and record of individual enterprises].

I am glad that the current Community strategy recognises the importance of combining instruments and of building partnerships.

We should focus first on outcomes – health and safety improvements – and then decide what is the best way of achieving that. Here in Great Britain, we have set challenging targets for reductions to fatalities, major injury accidents, work related ill-health and overall reduction to the number of working days lost. That has forced us to think through strategically how to achieve these targets.

If we in Europe can make a coherent and compelling case, working in partnership, using a flexible range of tools, then people and organisations will be persuaded to seek genuine health and safety improvements rather than just paying lip service to the issue. We want employers to implement continuous improvement, not grudgingly doing the minimum because of the misguided view that health and safety is a burden rather than a business benefit.

And raising health and safety standards in ways that also enhance enterprise performance is essential if we are to meet the Lisbon targets. This will mean more workers at work in quality jobs with safe and healthy environments. That colleagues is what we are all about.

[Introduce Lord Hunt.]