

MINUTES OF THE 11TH MEETING OF THE ENGINEERING INDUSTRY NOISE TASK GROUP (EINTG) ON 29TH OCTOBER 2002 AT HSE BIRMINGHAM

Attendees

Gary Booton - Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF) (EINTG Chairman)
Bob Taylor - British Turned Parts Manufacturers Association (BTPMA)
Tony Romaniuk - Motor Industry Safety Group (MISG)
Colin Holdhusen - Corus
Peter Wilson - Industrial Noise and Vibration Centre (INVC)
Stan Hardy - Confederation of British Metalforming (CBM)
Martin Bevan - General Municipal Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union (GMB)
Teresa Cunningham - Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Publications
Dave Dawick - HSE Publications
Barry Wilkes - Sandwell Healthcare NHS Trust
Anna Harrington - Sandwell Healthcare NHS Trust
David Jeffery - Rolls Royce Plc
Graham Watson - HSE (EINTG Secretary) Engineering and Utilities Sector
Tim Ward - HSE Technology Directorate
Bob Hanlon - EEF West Midlands
Tony McCarthy - National Union of Domestic Appliances & General Operatives Union
David Allison - Marine Painting Forum
Rebecca Hathaway - HSE Health Directorate

Apologies

David Brotherton - Metalforming Machinery Makers Association
Rob Walker - Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders
Tim Deakin - MISG
David Powell - Association of British Insurers (ABI)
Tim Humphreys - ABI
Alan Robson - Confederation of Shipbuilding & Engineering Unions
Marjory Mitchell - HSE Health Unit
Richard Griffiths - Machine Tool Technologies Association

Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed

Matters arising from the minutes not on the agenda

A meeting had been held with the Royal National Institute for the Deaf to discuss the work of the EINTG and the possibility of the RNID becoming Task Group members. Ways in which the RNID could assist the Task Group were also explored including providing case studies of people suffering from occupational noise induced deafness, links to their website and generally supporting the work of the EINTG. A final decision as to whether the RNID is willing to join the EINTG is awaited.

Action: Graham Watson

Following the last meeting an amended mission statement, terms of reference and business plan were circulated with the meeting's minutes. Members agreed with the changes that had been made. Copies of the amended documents will be placed on the Engineering and Utilities Sector's web page.

Action: Graham Watson

An article written by Gary Booton, outlining the work of the EINTG had been published in the Safety and Health Practitioner magazine. Delays had been encountered in circulating details of the EINTG throughout the GMB although it was still proposed to do so.

Action: Martin Bevan

Stan Hardy reported a lack of conclusive research on the effect on young peoples' hearing of their leisure activities. The Sector Information Minute providing feedback on the Engineering and Utilities Sector's Noise Objective had not yet been issued the Task Group will be advised when this happens. Update: this has now been issued to HSE Inspectors.

Action: Graham Watson

The new HSE free leaflet and employee pocket card on noise have now been issued, as has Engineering Information Sheet No 39 Reducing noise from CNC punch presses. Task Group members including the EEF and the CBM have agreed to help distribute the sheet.

Sandwell Health Action Zone - Workwell

Barry Wilkes and Anna Harrington from Sandwell Healthcare NHS Trust provided members with a presentation on the Workwell project (copies of the overheads used are enclosed for members not at the meeting). The underlying goal of the scheme is to tackle health inequality by focusing on occupational health and safety in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). The first stage of this is to build relationships with the companies involved by breaking down suspicions, using a known intermediary such as Business Links can assist with this. Following an initial site visit a full workplace assessment is undertaken using the principles detailed in HSG65 Successful health and safety management. A confidential prioritised report is then produced identifying areas for action. The report is intended to act as a signpost to where further specific assistance can be sought and not to replace the work of a consultant. Finally the company comes back and states exactly what they need help with.

Occupational health is often seen as a mystery to many employers, the Workwell project seeks to demystify it. Many SMEs will not be around in 5 years time and have few resources consequently their main motivation is not health and safety. The project therefore seeks to promote a positive model of health and safety. The assistance provided to SMEs needs to be on their terms. Providing the specific help they want can later provide an opportunity to tackle the other areas where action is also needed. It is important to identify who the key player is in a company and what motivates them and to then stress the benefits to them in very simple language. Useful intermediaries are the Federation of Small Businesses and the Chamber of Commerce.

From visits made to workplaces they have identified problems with noise assessments. SMEs also assume contractors/ consultants are competent and will provide them with what they need. The proposed EITNG guidance on what should be included in a noise

assessment was therefore welcomed. Guidance on SMEs needs to focus on what they can do for themselves. It was important that where there is delay in a noise assessment being undertaken that firms do not postpone other action that they can still take. A multi-disciplinary approach was needed to avoid the problem of consultants undertaking noise assessments without addressing the issue of health surveillance and conversely occupational health professionals tackling the issue of health surveillance but not the need for noise assessments. Supply chain influences also play a part. Companies often have quality procedures, as their customers require them to; similar requests are not though made concerning health and safety. If such requests were made companies would have to respond to them.

The problem of tackling key members of staff who refuse to co-operate with health and safety matters was discussed. This can be a real problem at the smaller end of the scale particularly in family firms. Concerns were also expressed with the noise Single Issue Inspection Programme as since this focused only on noise, employers assumed that action was not needed in other areas.

Firms which were either unionised, had access to a consultant or were members of a trade association tended to have access to health and safety information. Companies not falling within any of these did not have such information. There was though the problem of information overload, of having to filter out what was needed. People often seek help with this on a face to face to basis.

How the Task Group can get good practices for addressing noise into workplaces was discussed. This could include emulating the work of the Workwell project by getting good practices into a limited number of workplaces on a small geographic scale. This fitted into the Task Group's remit of producing straightforward quick fixes and proving that they can work. This may though need one to one contact but could be achieved by utilising intermediaries.

The INVC has developed a database of noise control measures including simple, low cost solutions. By using video recordings it is possible to identify possible noise control remedies remotely without having to visit the site. This avoided the situation of only needing to spend a small sum for the noise control measure but a large sum for the advice.

Distributing guidance via the Association of British Insurers was raised. It was also stated that SMEs are block rated by Insurers. As a result they do not have the option that large employers have of negotiating reductions or mitigating increases in their employer liability insurance premiums, on the condition that certain improvements are made.

Given there has been a Code of Practice on noise since 1964 and little progress has been made a new way of working is needed. The merits of doing a small pilot project were discussed. While the benefits of this would initially be limited it would get solutions to people at the sharp end. Graham Watson and Stan Hardy agreed to look into this to see what could be done.

Action: Graham Watson and Stan Hardy

The details of the Black Country Forging and Foundry Project were discussed. The project is the result of a partnership between the Black Country local authorities, the GMB Union, the Confederation of British Metalforming and the British Foundry Association. The purpose of the project is to identify cost effective solutions to environmental noise problems in the forging and foundry industries. Funding was secured from the European Union and a pilot scheme involving research work by the Institute of Sound and Vibration has been successful in reducing noise levels. Backing up the project is a video, a CD and a booklet, which can be downloaded from the web site of the Institute of Sound and Vibration at <http://www.isvr.co.uk/bcfff/forgeint.htm>. Copies of the booklet are also available from the CBM (tel. 0121 601 6350).

Statistics for noise induced deafness

Statistics for noise induced deafness (see <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/2001/hsspt2.pdf>) were discussed. The statistics for cases of noise-induced deafness qualifying for disablement benefit do not give a true picture as the 50 decibels required to be eligible for benefit represents a severe hearing loss. Many people who have a hearing loss less than this but still have great difficulty hearing will not be included in these figures. The decline in figures overtime partly reflects a change in employment patterns rather than the problem of noise at work having been tackled successfully. Engineering industries and associated occupations feature heavily in the statistics confirming the extent to which noise is a problem in the Engineering Sector.

HSE Noise priority programme

Very limited information is available on how the noise priority programme is progressing, that which is available relates to all industries and not specifically to engineering. The possibility that HSE's Field Operations Directorate may suspend the noise priority programme was discussed although this has still to be confirmed. If this does happen noise will instead be dealt with as a matter of evident concern. Further information on this was needed to ensure that a consistent message was given on the importance of noise at work. Data on progress made by the Revitalising Health and Safety Campaign is available on the HSE website at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/revitalising/progress/index.htm>. Statistical information on health and safety is also available on the website at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/index.htm>

A document providing feedback on HSE'S Noise Single Issue Inspection Programme (SIIP) was circulated (Document 1 enclosed). This highlighted the following areas of concern noise assessments, the maintenance of ear protection, the use of ear protection, training on noise at work issues and the demarcation of ear protection zones. A large number of small employers performed particularly badly in these areas. The EINTG must therefore be able to communicate successfully with employers of this size.

EINTG Guidance

The proposed toolbox talk pack on noise was discussed. It is proposed that this will be based on a series of short sessions, each one backed up with a question and answer brief, a small pocket card with a self adhesive label and a poster. It is also proposed that the pack contain an audio cassette or CD comprising an audiogram, a simulation of what it is like to lose your hearing and personal testimonies of what it is like to be deaf. The use of a video was also discussed although for cost reasons it is proposed to use

an existing video rather than develop one from new. Issues that need to be considered are: the guidance must be strongly focused on the target group; the pack will only be as good as the person who delivers it; and the message needs to be conveyed in simple terms. The distribution of the pack will also need to be targeted effectively to make sure that it gets to the target group and that if a number of intermediaries are used they do not send the packs to the same people.

The Task Group were asked to look at existing HSE noise guidance such as the new noise leaflet to see if it could meet our needs and to see if it will hit our target. HSE could rebadge the leaflet and alter it slightly to make it fit for our purposes. HSE has recently released a priced pack advising on the use of metal working fluids. This contains a number of priced publications and laminated checklist sheets. HSE's publications department could develop a similar pack for the toolbox talk pack although it is not clear how much the issue price would be. Those organisations involved in the creation of the pack would get a certain number of free copies of the pack for further distribution. HSE will consider waving the development costs of the pack if a small-scale trial run of the pack is carried out to test its effectiveness. This will though be reconsidered if the distribution of the pack is extended nationwide. It is important that the content of the pack starts off simple. HSE's publications department can offer editorial, design and in-house print facilities.

Ways of ensuring that the message is received were discussed including holding awareness raising sessions, the use of local radio stations and the use of safety representatives.

The working party will meet again to progress this issue. Teresa Cunningham from HSE's publications department will also attend the meeting.

Action: Working party members

EINTG web site

The Task Group has unfortunately been unsuccessful in securing European Funding for the web site. Gary Booton will write to suppliers in the noise field to try and source alternative funding.

Action: Gary Booton

Supply of machinery

Due to a lack of time it was agreed to carry forward this issue to the next meeting. In the meantime it was agreed to explore holding a meeting of the machinery suppliers who are members of the Task Group to discuss how this issue can be progressed.

Action: Graham Watson

Physical Agents (Noise) Directive

The text of the Directive has now been agreed although a copy of the finalised text was not available. When the text is available it will be e-mailed to EINTG members. A paper detailing the main provisions of the Directive, a timetable of events and details of stakeholder meetings was circulated (Document 2 enclosed).

Noise research

Papers relating to the Noisechem project were circulated with the meeting's agenda to make people aware of the research work and in case any members wished to help with the research. The EEF were not taking this issue further as they felt there were weaknesses in the research protocol. The papers had been forwarded to the Marine Painting Forum although no feedback had yet been received. The papers will also be circulated within the GMB.

Action: Martin Bevan

Any members who become involved in the research were asked to report back to the EINTG.

Any other business

Tony Romaniuk reported that this was his last EINTG meeting as he was retiring. Thanks were extended to Tony for his contribution to the work of the EINTG and he was wished well for the future. Tony in turn wished the EINTG success for the future.

Dates and venues of next meetings

20th May 2003 HSE Rose Court, London
21st October 2002 HSE Birmingham