

HSC OPEN MEETING 12 OCTOBER 2004

BREAK-OUT SESSION 2 – OUR ROLE IN PUBLIC PROTECTION

Chair: Margaret Burns
Rapporteur: Jonathan Russell

Introduction

The Chair explained that this break-out session was to explore views on the broader issues that underpin public safety and its regulation. The HSC wanted to hear participants' views on the issues. These will help lay the ground for a wider debate that the HSC wanted to encourage across Government with the aim of greater clarity of responsibilities for the agencies involved in public safety issues.

The open discussion

There was a high degree of participation in a lively and wide-ranging discussion. The contributions confirmed how difficult it often is to consider public safety issues in isolation from workplace safety, but did raise a number of valuable points - from which emerged three common themes around the role of 'government' in public protection:

Communication

- the public need more information about the risks they face – and, if better informed, would be better able to act as a positive force for change and improved standards;
- there are examples where raising awareness of risks could be achieved through better public information provision – for example, produced or funded by those whose activities give rise to risks (also an example of working in partnerships);
- communication is the best means of effecting cultural change along with acceptance that risks have to be managed and controlled.

Education

- influencing educators to help ensure that risk education is included in the curriculum, so that future generations are able to make informed decisions about risks;
- we need to encourage a more risk-literate society otherwise perceptions of risk become distorted, especially in single-issue media coverage
- risks to the public are increasingly multi-faceted and their consequences no longer clearly distinguishable from other societal ills – for example, smoking.

Partnership

- recognition that public safety is something that HSC/E, and indeed Government, can't address on their own. Need to engage in partnerships with others – joined up working with Government Departments and engaging sectors of the economy about what they are doing about risks;
- the role of Government should be catalyst for information and persuasion through working with others, including the media;
- more proactive approaches needed - including self-regulation, taking responsibility for one's own actions. Resources should be targeted where they will make a difference.

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