

A Communication Strategy for the HSC/E

(2004/5 to 2006/7)

Introduction

Communication activities across the Health and Safety Commission and Executive have been reviewed over the past 18 months with the support of the Star Alliance. This has involved asking tough questions about how HSC/E are perceived by the outside world, how we perceive ourselves, our approach to communication planning, the way communication functions are structured, and the attitude towards communication across the organisation.

The conclusion of this wide-ranging review is that communication across the HSC/E does not stand comparison with best practice of comparable organisations and can be seen as:

- peripheral to the achievement of the organisation's mission, vision and corporate goals and lacking of a culture where there is a common belief in, understanding of, and commitment to the value of communications activity;
- fragmented, reactive and carrying insufficient weight and influence.

It should be emphasised that the review demonstrated evidence of pockets of very good work being undertaken: in the press office, within DIAS, through the Infoline, and within the individual Directorates. Nonetheless, it amounts to tactical rather than strategic communication activity – lacking central direction and therefore cannot be significantly or cost-effectively contributing to the organisation's overall goals.

There is already a consensus within the HSC/E leadership that, far from being peripheral, communication needs to be central to the organisation's activity. This is based upon the assumption that it can make an increasingly cost-effective contribution to the achievement of our goals.

As proof of this commitment, the new Strategy for Workplace Health and Safety to 2010, which was agreed by the Commission, sets communications as one of its four key themes. Therefore, not only must we improve our communications because we recognise that

there are weaknesses, but also because the success of our Strategy depends more heavily on it than ever before.

A new Communications Directorate was put in place at the beginning of January 2004, and inherited a draft communications strategy from the Star Alliance. Having had an opportunity to look at the draft strategy, and at our communication outputs, the Director of Communications has redrafted the strategy.

This new version sets out six communication objectives and the milestones to be achieved over each of the next three years in order to achieve them. The specifics of the Star Alliance proposals (the four building blocks for effective communications, and the objectives of Augmentation, Stand Alone and Communicating through others) are captured in the new set of objectives and milestones set out in the appendix. Essentially, these objectives break down into two broad categories:

- setting in place an effective communication infrastructure;
- aligning our communication activities to the priorities of the HSC/E Strategy

This Communication Strategy is meant to be a start in a much wider process that is designed to enable us to carry out more detailed communication planning with a clear sense of our priorities. We will update this strategy annually, and keep it under constant review so that it remains relevant to the objectives of the HSC/E and the environment within which it must be delivered.

Context

Our Communication Strategy will need to take account of the context in which we will operate over the coming year.

- We have a new strategy for Workplace Health and Safety to 2010, and the HSE will need to refocus and work in different ways in order to deliver it.
- The major risks of harm in the new economy come from occupational health – though we must not ignore real and continuing safety risks.
- Health and safety issues, and the HSC/E, have had limited impact on public

awareness in recent years. In the main, HSC/E comes to public attention following catastrophic incidents.

- The Spending Review is scheduled for later in the year, and it is expected to be a tough round.
- We face mounting criticism within railway industry, and the Secretary of State for Transport has just announced a review of how the industry is regulated.
- We face a constant risk of needing to respond to catastrophic incidents which could deflect our focus at any point in time.
- We are perceived by many stakeholders as being slow and bureaucratic.
- Increasingly both government and Opposition are questioning the role and extent of regulation across the board.
- The Freedom of Information Act will come into effect at the beginning of 2005, placing massive demands on us to make available a wide range of information to the outside world.
- The recently published Phillis Review sets out the need for Government communication to be more strategic, adequately skilled and resourced, integrated into the Civil Service (particularly at senior levels), utilising a broad range of channels, and having control over communications spending.
- Internally, we are facing a range of changes within HSC/E which include the following:
 - we are undergoing change – the role of Commissioners is to be more heavily focused on strategic issues and being a voice of health and safety,
 - staff are being encouraged to operate on a “one HSE” basis and to change the way we work accordingly,
 - pay issues are causing concern with a threat of industrial action,
 - there is uncertainty about the various programmes in terms of their content and links between them,
 - and we have committed to putting communications at the heart of what we do as an organisation but most of the organisation is unclear about what this will mean

We are operating, therefore, in a world of more complex workplaces, where the causes of harm are very different from 30 years ago when we were created. In response, we are changing as an organisation. But we also face some hostility, and questioning of our role, among a number of opinion leaders and key stakeholders. In order to create the space to

deliver our ambitious strategy in a more complex world of health and safety, we must grow bolder in strengthening and defending our reputation.

Objectives

In order to develop a fit for purpose approach to communications, and assist in delivering the objectives set out in the *Strategy for Workplace Health and Safety to 2010*, there are six communication objectives which we must deliver over the course of this three-year Communications Strategy. These communication objectives, and the broader purpose they serve, are set out below. In the appendix at the end of this document, we outline the communication milestones that we need to achieve, over the coming years, in order to deliver these objectives.

Communication Objectives	Purpose
1. Put in place effective internal communications	Essential building block for success in any organisation, especially one undergoing significant changes in ways of working.
2. Develop a communications culture across the HSC/E	Essential building block for effective communications, and for achieving HSC/E's objective of 'communicating the vision'
3. Establish a strong and dynamic strategic communications approach	Effective building block for effective communications, and for achieving HSC/E's objective of 'communicating the vision'
4. Help to build and solidify partnerships by better communicating with, and through, a growing band of partners	To support achievement of HSC/E's objective of 'developing closer partnerships'
5. Present a clear picture of our role and focus – reinforcing this by constantly communicating the work we do	To support achievement of HSC/E's objective of 'focusing on our core business and the right interventions where we are best placed to reduce workplace injury and ill health'
6. Promote the case for sensible health and safety by communicating its benefits	To support achievement of HSC/E's objective of 'helping people to benefit from effective health and safety management and a

	sensible health and safety culture' and packaging the messages
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Audiences

We interact with a wide range of groups and individuals across just about every sector of the economy. We will also need to raise public awareness of health and safety. If our communications strategy were to attempt to give equal weight in addressing all the groups we interact with, it would prove a hugely inefficient and ineffective task. Therefore, we must focus on those audiences that are most important to delivering our objectives of improving health and safety. For the course of this strategy, the audiences we will be targeting include:

- HSE staff and Commissioners
- Duty holders and the intermediaries who can get to them:
 - large organisations who, between them, employ the majority of our workforce and carry most of our health and safety risks;
 - small organisations who are far more difficult to reach and are less clear about how to implement health & safety;
 - organisations who influence how businesses approach risk management – e.g., insurance companies.
- Workforce – in unionised and non-unionised environments
- Key stakeholders/opinion leaders – trade unions, business associations, think tanks, MPs, key journalists, key NGOs, etc
- National government and devolved administrations
- Local government – in particular, LGA and those Members and Senior Officers responsible for environmental health
- Other regulators

This is a very large and ambitious list. We cannot hope to be effective if we try to give equal weight to all of them in every year of our three-year strategy. Therefore, for the first year (2004/5) our communications will be disproportionately slanted towards the following audiences:

- HSC/E Staff and Commissioners

- National government
- Key stakeholders/opinion leaders

In future years we will aim to rebalance this in order to place a greater focus on communicating with large firms, local government, individual workers, and small firms.

Messages

As with our audiences, our messages need to be focused. We should regularly incorporate the following key messages in our communications with the outside world:

- Sensible health and safety is a cornerstone of a civilised society.
- Sensible health and safety is about managing risks, not eliminating them.
- The people best placed to make workplaces safer from harm are the staff and managers who work in them. They do this best by working together.
- We are committed to being a good partner – working with others to improve health and safety

Communication Channels

In the past, we have placed excessive reliance on publications and leaflets as the channel for communicating information and messages. We need to strike a better balance. Publications and leaflets have their place in the communications mix, but as one element and should not be seen as our primary proactive method.

Over the coming year, therefore, we must continue to build and develop on our strong **web** presence – which must increasingly be seen as our primary mechanism for communicating with the world. We must also use other communication channels to increase web usage. We will identify and exploit a wider range of opportunities to be communicated both through **national and regional media**. We will enhance our **stakeholder relations management** capabilities – including the way we manage relations with government departments, unions, business organisations and MPs, since these are critically important relationships which remain an area of weakness for us. **Commissioners** and **senior managers** will be used more consistently as a channel for communicating messages to,

and receiving feedback from, our key stakeholders. Our **internal communications** will be strengthened, as we identify the most effective channels for encouraging two-way communication across the organisation. Our **information services** will need to support the commitment in the HSC/E strategy to provide accessible advice and support – this may need greater partnership working to realise. And we will need to use a wide range of **marketing** and **advertising** techniques to sell the health and safety messages to the nation's workforce and small businesses as we move into later years of this Strategy.

Communication Planning

Immediately following this Strategy, we intend to set out a national communication plan for 2004/5 which will outline the detailed communication activities which will take place in order to support delivery of the Strategy in the first year.

Conclusion

This Strategy sets out an ambitious programme to develop our communication over the coming years. This marks the starting point in our ambition to apply a more strategic approach to our communication activities. We now need to show the discipline required to turn this Strategy into practical activities which are then implemented. This is precisely what we must do if we are to achieve our corporate objective of 'communicating the vision'.

4 February 2004

APPENDIX

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY – OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Objectives	2004/5 milestones	2005/6 milestones	2006/7 milestones
<p>1. <i>Put in place effective internal communication</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear picture has been established about the internal communication systems that are in place, and the preferences among staff about the channel they wish to receive information through. • Communication channels are in place which match the preferences of the majority of our staff. • The HSC strategy has been clearly communicated to staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers are confidently and effectively communicating key messages to staff and receiving feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff see themselves as part of ‘one HSE’, rather than identifying their roles only in relation to their specific directorate and team.
<p>2. <i>Develop a communication culture across the HSC/E</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioners, the Board, and SCS are clear about our communication priorities and are being deployed consistently to communicate key messages to key audiences. • We have built, across the HSE, a network of communications supporters who are working with the Board and Communications Directorate to promote a communications culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers across the HSE are engaging with the communications process – sharing information and discussing tactics with the Communications Directorate at an early stage. • There is a large network of managers and staff who are aware of the benefits and principles of communications, and are active supporters. • We have in place a network of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Across HSE, strategic communications thinking is constantly being applied at the front-end of the development of initiatives and programmes. The organisation is not only supportive of communication, but also communication-savvy. • The outside world views HSC/E as an effective voice for sensible health and safety – our ability to communicate this message is

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is being used more widely across the HSC/E as an intervention rather than a tail-end support mechanism. 	<p>senior staff who are skilled in communications and act as spokespeople.</p>	<p>widely respected.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have substantially improved the communication competence of HSE staff. • Our staff are an effective sales force for the strategy and messages
<p>3. <i>Establish a strong and dynamic strategic communication approach</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HSC/E is presenting itself in a more consistent way – creating a clearer brand. • We have accumulated substantial information about what motivates people to support health and safety issues, and who we should be targeting our communication effort at. • Basic communication planning systems have been put in place, with a model mapped out for future years. • Standard communication evaluation systems are in place. • Effective systems are in place for capturing intelligence about key stakeholder groups. • Communication professionals across HSE are working effectively together, with clarity about their objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good communication planning systems are in place, and we are targeting resources more effectively. • We have learnt lessons from the previous year, and have used it to further strengthen our communication activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HSE is prioritising communication efforts effectively, by ensuring strong links between such activities and our strategic goals. • Our communication outputs are evidence-based – focusing on audiences and delivering messages that we know to be effective.

<p>4. <i>Help to build and solidify partnerships by better communicating with, and through, a growing band of partners</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are clear about who our key partners are and how we will establish a relationship with them. • We have begun to communicate to partners that we are changing. • We have begun to communicate to critics that we are changing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are developing excellent, shared communication systems with our partners. • We have substantially broadened our reach by working with partners to spread key messages. • Our key regulatory partners are clear about how we are changing, and how we wish to work in partnership with them to promote health & safety. • Our partners are also beginning to use the phrase “sensible health and safety” in promoting our common cause. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HSE is supporting a wide range of effective partnerships, which are actively communicating the benefits and proper approach to sensible health and safety. • We have built a network of partners who are actively speaking up in defence of sensible health and safety.
<p>5. <i>Present a clear picture of our role and priorities – reinforcing this by constantly communicating the work we do</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The message of “sensible health and safety” has been communicated extensively to key stakeholders. • We have promoted our desire to focus our regulatory activities in a rational way, and have defined what this will mean. • We are exploiting opportunities to communicate our main areas of activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have communicated the successes of the new ways of working, demonstrating that HSC/E has lived up to what we promised and is becoming a model regulator. • We have identified and promoted supporters who are willing to speak out in defence of sensible health and safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key stakeholders know what our priorities are, and are clear about the role we would like them to play.
<p>6. <i>Promote the case for sensible health & safety by communicating its</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The message of sensible health and safety has been communicated extensively to key stakeholders and opinion leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have extended the message of sensible health and safety beyond key stakeholders and opinion leaders and are targeting this more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The case for health and safety has been widely disseminated across the economy – with business leaders and employee

<p><i>benefits</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The economic and moral case for health & safety has continued to be presented to key stakeholders and opinion leaders. 	<p>extensively to employees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not only are we communicating the health and safety message, but the partnerships we have successfully developed are starting to do so likewise – either with us or on their own. 	<p>representatives willing to take the lead on the matter.</p>
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