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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

Making more information free and accessible on the web

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Issue

1. This paper summarises progress in making more information free and accessible on the web and new developments to the web.

Timing

2. For information.

Recommendation

3. HSC to note developments.

Background

4. HSE's statement on providing accessible advice and support emphasised the important role communications would play in realising the HSC Strategy. In meeting this objective, there is a requirement to develop and improve existing HSE services for the provision of information by producing accessible, relevant, useable and understandable information that is effectively marketed – and takes advantage of the Internet.

Provision of information

Publications

5. A commercial strategy has been prepared aimed at providing a clear and consistent approach to the handling of categories of publications that will generate income (£5

million per annum for years 2005/6 to 2007/8) and identifying those that can now be made freely available on the web. The strategy was agreed by the HSE Board at its February 2005 meeting (HSE/05/06).

6. The strategy identified 1,000 publications which can now be made available free of charge. Work will shortly commence to convert these to non-priced web publications. The conversion work is aimed at ensuring these publications are of a 'web-lite' nature ie unnecessary tints and colour removed, so that the documents can be readily viewed and downloaded from the HSE website.
7. It was identified within the Strategy that the required income cannot be achieved from selling the existing catalogue of products. The strategy identified the need to produce a small number, (no more than 12), new commercially viable publications each year. These will be developed with Communications Directorate and in consultation with the appropriate Directorate or Sector within HSE.
8. In view of the competing needs to generate income and make more information freely available, HSE's charging policy will be discussed at a forthcoming Board meeting in the summer, taking any review action on the remaining 600 priced publications.

Internet Services

9. Over the coming year, we will continue to develop a strong web presence - key to our plans for improving access to publications – and for sharing other information and advice with all our stakeholders.
10. There is no doubt about the potential - interest in HSE's online communications increased significantly in the last year. Internet use in the UK has grown by around 15% and our website is experiencing growth above that - November 2004 was the busiest month so far with:
 - over 600,000 people visiting our sites at least once
 - 1.9 million visits (each visitor can pay more than one visit)
 - over 8 million pages downloaded
11. Our target is to double the number of visits by March 2007. To achieve it, we will need useful, usable web services working closely with Infoline to attract new customers and convert them into regular users. We will continue to develop new sites; improve content management to keep content up to date; react quickly to important requests; and improve in the areas outlined below:

Web Standards

Compliance with International, UK Government and HSE's web standards will help ensure our sites are:

- accessible by all our stakeholders – including people with disabilities; and

- consistent in terms of presentation, navigation and content - in line with the corporate brand.

Innovation

Assessing and adopting ideas, techniques and media to make communications more interesting and effective. We have already started to use:

- audio, video and moving images;
- online 'communities' - to make it easier to share information, ideas, experiences;
- e- bulletins – allowing people to request updates by industry, topic etc.

Publicity / News

Making more of free and paid publicity to ensure people are aware of what's on offer from HSE Online. The launch of a new Intranet 'News Centre' in March 2005 will:

- provide up to date stories about HSC\E and health and safety at work from newspapers and journals;
- help communicate important decisions;
- let people know about events in advance (campaign launches, TV / radio broadcasts etc.); and
- show we put the record straight when appropriate.

Evaluation

The more we depend on online communications, the more important it is to assess the popularity, usability, usefulness, reliability and performance of our websites. We aim to:

- learn more about site visitors (e.g. where they came from, what they downloaded, their route through the site; where they left, how long they stayed etc.)
- use research to provide a better insight into customer requirements; why people don't use our sites; or fail to return after one visit.

Consultation

12. Communications Directorate, Communications Delivery Service and PEFD.

Presentation

13. None.

Costs and Benefits

14. This initiative will reduce the cost of accessing a wide range of HSE information and help meet the strategic objective of improving accessibility to and thus take up of advice and guidance.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

15. The costs of transferring publications to the web can only be broadly estimated until we know the outcome of an exercise to contract this work. However, we are working on an assumption of £360k, nearly all of which will be incurred during 2005/06. The potential write off of stocks of hard copy publications converted to the web is £152k. These costs have been included in the business planning.