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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

A Paper by Colin Douglas

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Issue

1. This paper summarises progress since the July (Quarter 1) 2005 update.

Timing

2. One of a series of quarterly updates.

Recommendation

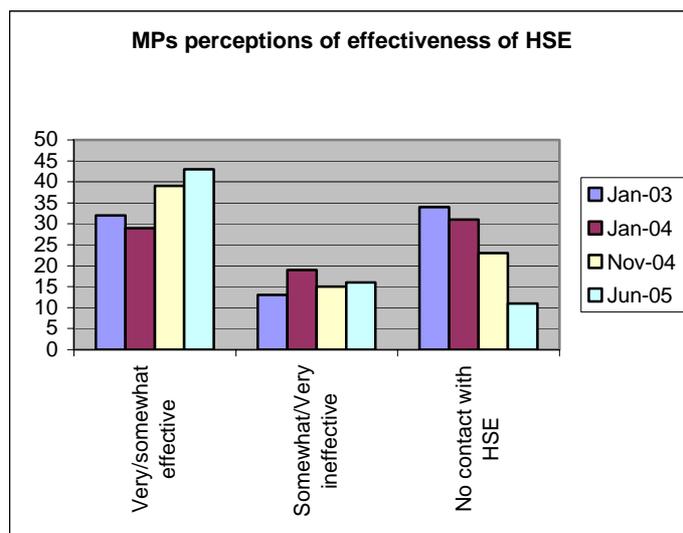
3. HSC to note developments set out in this report.

Background

4. The Communication strategy agreed by HSC is built on objectives and milestones to:
 - Promote the case for health and safety
 - Present a clear picture of HSC/E's role and focus
 - Build partnerships
 - Put in place effective internal communications
 - Establish a strategic communications approach
 - Develop a communications culture

Promoting the case for health and safety and raising our profile

5. Our strategy identified key target audiences and the initial 2004-5 focus on national government and key stakeholders was extended for 2005-6 to employers and employees. We track progress through a twice yearly MPs survey and an annual MORI poll. 2005 MORI results were reported in the last quarterly update (HSC/05/99). Latest data on MPs attitudes to and contact with HSE are encouraging (see table below). Despite a post election new intake, we have seen a rise in the proportion of MPs with favourable opinions of HSE (from 39% last November to 43% in July) and an increase in contacts with HSE. Our efforts to raise our profile with this group (see para 7 below) are paying off.



6. **Sensible health and safety.** The [HSE web forum on 'Risk'](#), launched on 13 July, will close on 5 October. The framework questions that were posed in the forum were:

- How much of a problem is risk aversion?
- What are the main issues?
- What are the underlying causes?
- How should we tackle them?
- Will getting tough on risk aversion reduce health and safety protection?
- How do we stop that happening?

The forum has received over 350 contributions, mainly from individuals with a professional interest in health and safety, and has had over 20,000 visitors. The main debate forum – on risk aversion – has received the most interest, and the site's subsections on public safety, education and local government have to date received fewer responses.

7. Recent activity to stimulate further debate on the subject has been focused on the Commission's presence at the three major political Party Conferences. Despite some organisational glitches, HSC's fringe events went well. HSC's Liberal Democrat conference fringe meeting was one of the busiest at the conference and involved a large number of Liberal Democrat local councillors in the audience who contributed views. At the Labour Party Conference Lord Hunt focussed his speech on sensible risk management and praised HSC for taking a lead in stimulating a national stakeholder debate on the subject. The Conservative Party Conference fringe meeting on 5 October involved Tim Boswell MP, Shadow Minister for Work, who emphasised the importance of health & safety and the fact that this is a subject matter which many MPs will be all too familiar with as a result of constituency work, and Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, Chair of the Local Government Association, welcomed the improving working relations with the HSC but raised concerns about work practices of HSE. See Annex to this paper for public affairs consultancy, AS Biss, report on party conference fringe meetings.

8. HSE will be organising a series of stakeholder roundtable discussion forums over the autumn, bringing together those groups most involved in each of the particular strands of the risk debate and focussed on the practical actions that should be taken to support and further encourage a sensible risk management approach.

9. **Corporate Campaigns.** Interim results for the Better Backs! Campaign in the last update indicated good media coverage and website activity. The impact of the overall campaign – press and radio advertising included - was evaluated in July and key results were:

- 6% increase in employers' awareness of campaign

- 10% increase in supervisors' awareness of campaign
- 8% increase in employees' awareness of campaign
- those in construction and manufacturing more likely to be aware of the campaign
- lower levels of impact in the public sector
- 46% said they would take action as a result of the campaign

A second phase of the campaign will run in January in which inspectors will revisit a sample of workplaces and a rerun of the evaluation of the communications campaign will provide more information on how far awareness has been converted into action.

10. The next campaign to run is a Watch Your Step campaign in October. It aims to raise awareness of slips/trips as the major cause of major injury, of costs, that preventing them isn't difficult or expensive and to promote a 'don't just see it, sort it' message.

11. Like the MSD campaign it combines inspector activity with national advertising on press and radio, PR and media activity. The campaign will be supported by posters for display in the workplace via Infoline and the web,

12. **Media relations.** Volumes of coverage picked up substantially in July and August after the lowest recorded volume so far in June, also noticeable for a fall in HSE spokespeople in the media. June also saw the highest rating since evaluation began, with a marked decrease in negative messages in the national press. This overall result was due in large measure to the Better Backs campaign. Yorkshire and Humberside region retains a higher favourability rating following the 3-month pilot to improve coverage though volumes have dropped back.

13. **New Chief Press Officer.** Allison Potter Drake, took up post in September.

14. **HSE Online.** The aim of new research on HSE's website is to find out more about the needs of those who use the site; those who don't; and those who contribute to it. The findings will inform future plans for the site - and help improve content, navigation and design. An online survey of 5000 users has started and detailed interviews will follow. Over 1000 online questionnaires were completed in the first 2 days. The research will be followed by similar work on the HSE Intranet.

15. An 'Online Group' chaired by Colin Douglas has been set up to provide strategic advice on future developments of all HSE's online communications. Top of the priority list is a project to improve the way web content is created and maintained.

16. **Commission activity.** Bill Callaghan's speaking engagements included the launch of the House of Lords Sensible Risk campaign launch, LSE's Centre for the Analysis of Risk and Regulation conference, LACORS conference and a Strategy roadshow in Leeds. He attended the EU social partners stress launch and chaired the HSE fatal statistics press launch, HSC/E conference at London Chamber of Commerce to promote director leadership on h&s, and the UK EU Presidency conference on High Performing Workplaces. He was accompanied by Danny Carrigan, Judith Donovan, Judith Hackitt and John Longworth at Sensible Risk fringe events at the TUC, LibDem, Labour and Conservative conferences. Margaret Burns chaired a RIAC meeting, spoke at the Offshore Industry European conference and on a health and safety update course. Danny Carrigan addressed a Working Well Together roadshow, Worker Engagement conference and new FOD inspectors. Joyce Edmond Smith chaired meetings of the HSE-LA Moving Goods Safely Working Group. Judith Hackitt chaired HSE's Audit Committee. Sayeed Khan attended the Sensible Risk campaign lunch and a meeting chaired by Lord Hunt for occupational medicine stakeholders.

Building Partnerships

17. Initial plans with key messages are now in place for engagement with 30 key corporate stakeholders. A workshop of HSE lead contacts was held in September to deliver more coordinated approaches to key stakeholders and maintain momentum.

Internal Communications

18. Work in hand includes:

- a new quarterly corporate briefing system, 'exchange', was launched in July and feedback to date has been positive; a second briefing will start in October;
- The internal communications and online team are redesigning the Intranet;
- A review of how other organisations check the organisational pulse will inform improvements to our internal communications tool kit;
- A staff attitude survey at the end of September will deliver results for November
- Integration of internal communications into strategic programme planning processes

Strategic Communications

19. We have pressed on with work to coordinate, integrate and improve the impact of communications outputs. A communications message framework, developed and market tested to ensure our messages are generated from a common 'brand proposition' and set of values, is being rolled out.

20 **Commercial considerations.** Communications Delivery Service are currently reviewing HSE's charging policy and some Commissioners are being interviewed. Their review will be considered by the HSE Board in December and thereafter by HSC.

21. A programme to convert all website material into accessible, printer-friendly 'weblite' format will start in November.

Developing a communications culture

22. Since the last update a further 45 HSE staff from programme and other teams have had training in communications planning – bringing total numbers trained in communications planning to 170 since February 2004 - and communications slots have been included in induction programmes for new FOD inspectors. Six new Communications managers have been recruited to support programmes and three now in post have had a 'corporate communications' induction.

Consultation

23. PEF, Communications Delivery Service

Presentation

24. None

Costs and benefits

25. Our resources on communications are allocated to communications activity within programmes and core work aimed at changing awareness, understanding, attitudes and behaviours, and to building a sound platform for that activity by creating a positive public image for HSC/E, good relationships with stakeholders, and effective internal communications.

Financial implications for HSE

26. Spend on Communications Directorate payroll and admin costs, plus support from the Government News Network for regional media coverage totalled £872,235 to end [Aug]. Spend on publications, publicity, and promotional activity to end-[Aug] (excluding Communications Delivery Service staff costs) was £3,159k (£1,949k on information, publicity, and online services, £1,210k on print and publications).

27. Staff costs of Communications Delivery Service were £736k to end-Aug. Income generated to end-Aug was £1,796k (£1,562k sale of priced publications and £234k royalties and copyright fees).

Health and Safety Commission

Party Conference Fringe Meeting Programme 2005

- Event:** Liberal Democrat Conference Fringe Event
"Thrill or spill: finding the balance between taking and avoiding risks"
Organised by the Health and Safety Commission
- Date:** 20 September 2005
- Place:** Winter Gardens, Blackpool
- Speakers:** Chair: Bill Callaghan, Chair of the Health and Safety Commission
Danny Alexander MP, Shadow Minister for Work
Baroness Hamwee, Chair of the London Assembly
Judith Donovan, Health and Safety Commissioner

Over 50 people attended this fringe meeting. Bill Callaghan introduced the debate, explaining that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) had launched a discussion on the sensible management of risk and was keen to listen to ideas on how excessive risk aversion can be tackled and reasonable risk assessment encouraged.

Danny Alexander MP

Mr Alexander delivered an enthusiastic and witty speech on the need to promote sensible attitudes to risk. He paid tribute to the work of the HSE, noting that it has an excellent reputation and had helped deliver a two-thirds reduction in the number of workplace fatalities since its inception.

Mr Alexander commended the HSE for launching the risk debate and said that he would be keen to see the results of the discussion in due course. He said that as the Liberal Democrats now control many county councils and municipal authorities they have a direct interest in the debate and should contribute to the Local Authority thread on the HSE's web forum on risk.

Particular attention was paid to the impact of risk averse attitudes on the disabled, and spoke of his concern that organisations cite health and safety rules as an excuse to discriminate against disabled people. He quoted the Disability Rights Commission paper, *Whose Right is it anyway?*, which documented this trend and he argued that better risk management should deliver more opportunities for the disabled. This theme was picked up throughout the meeting.

On a more political note, Mr Alexander stressed that there was plenty of action that Liberal Democrat MPs and MEPs could take to promote sensible attitudes to risk. One such example was Liz Lynne MEP's amendment of the Optical Radiation Directive which had threatened to legislate over whether employees could work in the sun or not and what kind of 'protection' from the sun they would need. He said that Liberal Democrats would work to improve the Compensation Bill, and seek to tackle excessive red tape and the gold-plating of EU Directives in Parliament.

Mr Alexander raised his direct constituency interest in the impact of risk aversion on firms organising adventure sports in his constituency in the Highlands. He argued strongly that young people need to be exposed to hazards in a supervised way in order to teach them to understand and manage risk themselves.

Baroness Hamwee

Baroness Hamwee gave a more personal take on risk issues, delving into her experiences as Chair of the London Assembly. She agreed that organisations should seek to manage risk, not eliminate it but noted that people often found it difficult to quantify risk. She gave the example of an Assembly member who had argued that trains carrying nuclear material were more at risk of attack following the July bombings when in fact the risk had not changed at all. Also, Londoners had taken to cycling following the bombings despite the increased the risk of injury this entailed.

Against the backdrop of Hurricane Katrina, Baroness Hamwee said that during civil emergencies it was key that risks were communicated quickly and accurately to the public. In her experience, this was done well by authorities during the London bombings. She went on to say, however, that the media all too often overstates risks and rejects a subtle handling of them.

Baroness Hamwee concluded that sometimes risk assessment requirements can distract from measured, common sense judgements, and that more work should be done to de-mystify risk assessments.

Judith Donovan

Judith Donovan made a passionate speech (at one point using two dolls) arguing that media stories about gravestones, conkers or swimming pools should not be allowed to taint the 'brand' of health and safety and the action HSE takes to protect workers. She stressed that the ultimate aim of the risk debate was to help reduce the number of work-based injuries and fatalities. 235 work based fatalities occurred last year.

She spoke of the Transco gas explosion and the death of four workers by a runaway trolley at Tebay as prime examples of why the work of HSE is as relevant as ever. She also emphasised that following health and safety guidance need not be onerous and that health and safety guidance only requires employers to take reasonable steps to manage risks.

Judith Donovan sketched out some of the risks that communities would face in the future. She pointed out that tough decisions would need to be taken over balancing an increase in urban development and the storage of gas in the Thames Gateway.

Questions

The speeches were followed by insightful and engaging points from a sizeable proportion of the audience based on their own experiences. In response to questions, Bill Callaghan said that all too often insurers, lawyers and safety consultants were responsible for adding extra layers of extraneous advice to HSE guidance. Following on from this, Danny Alexander said that it is important that the apparent gold-plating of EU directives is tackled quickly, and hoped that the Government's better regulation initiative can help achieve this.

Ruth Doyle, an IOSH representative, asserted that teachers do not receive sufficient training about health and safety and that advice issued by safety consultants may help. Judith Donovan said that IOSH workers were important but that too many safety consultants exaggerated risks.

Sally Hamwee told the audience that in her experience as a partner in a firm of solicitors, workers often abrogated their personal responsibility as they went into the office. In her view, small businesses needed to be able to assert a 'common sense' approach to health and safety.

Danny Alexander carried on this theme and said that the best way to tackle risk aversion is to give people appropriate information and allow them to exercise their own judgement. He continued to argue that 'risky' activities promote an enabling attitude to risk and hoped that the development of this culture is one of the outcomes of HSE's work.

The fringe finished with many of the attendees wishing that they could continue the debate and indeed some of them did so with the speakers.

Event: Labour Party Conference Fringe Event
Sensible risk management: Focussing on the big issues – how do we turn attention from trivial risks to those that cause real harm
Organised by the Health and Safety Commission

Date: 28 September 2005

Place: Belgrave Hotel, Brighton

Speakers: Chair: Bill Callaghan, Chair of the Health and Safety Commission
Lord Hunt, Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions
Judith Hackitt, HSC Commissioner
Danny Carrigan, HSC Commissioner

About 40 people met at the Belgrave Hotel to take part in the HSC fringe meeting. The audience was made up of conference delegates, particularly union representatives, and people from stakeholder groups such as IOSH. Following a buffet lunch Bill Callaghan introduced the event, highlighting the sensible risk debate.

Lord Hunt

Lord Hunt said that the last 30 years had been an 'outstanding success' in the health and safety field with the number of deaths at work falling by 30%. He said that he had enjoyed going on visits with inspectors and was particularly pleased with the role that unions had played in pushing for better health and safety conditions.

The minister talked about the announcement of the new Occupational Health Director shared between the DWP and Department of Health. He said that something needed to be done about the 'huge number of work days lost' and he hoped the new strategy, to be published later in the year, would address that.

While saying that it was 'very powerful' that HSC was leading on the sensible risk management debate Lord Hunt still felt that there were some problems:

- Some organisations had gone 'overboard on health and safety'. Lord Hunt felt that this was sometimes overly influenced by the insurance industry.
- Urban myths about things being closed or stopped because of 'health and safety'.
- The blaming of health and safety for unpopular decisions. E.g. organisations found it easier to blame health and safety for closures than admit to financial problems.

Lord Hunt spoke particularly about schools and pointed out that his children were still at school. He said that he wanted them to learn and develop and did not want them 'wrapped in cotton wool'.

Finally, Lord Hunt called on the HSC to take a more proactive role in rebutting 'silly stories' about health and safety so as to protect the whole policy area.

Judith Hackitt

Ms Hackitt outlined her extensive career in the chemical industry - an industry that has been at the forefront of the hazard and risk debate. She pointed out that the chemical industry was a high-hazard industry and could not do anything to change that. However, she outlined how the industry had sought to address that inherent difficulty by identifying and managing the risks involved.

Ms Hackitt felt there had been a lack of sensible dialogue about risk and she was pleased that the HSC was now trying to promote that debate. She also spoke of her school-age daughters and said she had been impressed with how their school had managed risk on trips. They had entered into a sensible dialogue which outlined the risks that could be managed by the school and those that were the responsibility of the parent or the child.

Danny Carrigan

Mr Carrigan recounted how he had lobbied Michael Foot, then shadow employment minister, in 1974 about health and safety issues and had been thrilled with the Health and Safety at Work Act. He pointed out that in all the talk about 'sensible risk management' people should not lose sight of the fact that there was still a 'constituency out there that feels people are being exploited'.

Mr Carrigan recounted how his son had been told by his local swimming pool that he could not take both his children into the pool as 'health and safety' said each child had to be accompanied by an adult. He had gone down to the pool to tell them this was not the case. He felt this showed that health and safety was not just about legislation but also about culture.

This was also in evidence on construction sites which Mr Carrigan had recently visited with an HSE inspector. He said that while there were many good things on display there was still a casual culture with regards to some health and safety issues.

Questions

There was a good question time covering issues including how to transition from a 'regulation-based' approach to a 'light-touch guidance' approach and what risk issues could be raised in the national curriculum to educate children.

An Amicus representative raised the issue of people working in sites of particular risk from acts of terrorism while others raised the issue of how to tackle the 'urban myths'.

Event: Conservative Party Conference Fringe Event
Risky Business: Is Risk Aversion Hurting Britain?
Organised by the Health and Safety Commission

Date: 5 October 2005

Place: Winter Gardens, Blackpool

Speakers: Chair: Bill Callaghan, Chair of the Health and Safety Commission
Tim Boswell MP, Shadow Minister for Work
Sir Sandy Bruce Lockhart, Chairman, Local Government Association
Carol Undy, President, Federation of Small Businesses
Judith Donovan, Health and Safety Commissioner

About 40 people attended the HSC fringe meeting at the Conservative Party Conference, with the audience made up of a mixed group of delegates, many of whom had experience of local government. Bill Callaghan introduced the debate by outlining some of the work that HSC and HSE have done to generate a debate on sensible risk and also de-bunking popular myths of examples of health and safety related decisions.

Tim Boswell

Tim Boswell delivered the first speech and said that some in the audience might express “shock and horror” that a Shadow Minister did in fact agree with much of what the HSC says and does. He went on to point to the experience that many MPs have through their constituency work in seeing examples of poor health and safety practice and its results, and said that as a result he believes that health and safety is an issue taken very seriously by most Parliamentarians.

Mr Boswell went on to say that the public need to have more education on risk and the nature of different risks. Unfortunately public debate to date on these issues has been contaminated by some players with “political agendas”, and Mr Boswell called for a mature debate on the subject from all sides of the political spectrum. He highlighted the particular issue of adventure trips and said that he believed that there should be cross-party support for Julian Brazier MP’s campaigning on the continuation of children’s activity trips.

Mr Boswell identified a major role for the legal system in determining public attitudes to risk, and said that HSC and HSE must consider carefully what role the threat (or perceived threat) of litigation has in encouraging risk averse decision making.

Mr Boswell ended his speech with a call for three actions from HSC:

1. To continue and develop the risk based strategy (in a way that does not however weaken the effectiveness of regulation where it is required)
2. To work with business to generate a better business understanding of the value of good health and safety
3. To work with the insurance industry to develop a system whereby good health and safety practice is recognised in reduced employer insurance premiums

Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhart

Sir Sandy started his speech by drawing a distinction between the work of HSC and that of HSE. He said that the LGA feels able to work alongside HSC effectively, but that he believed there are some real issues in the way that HSE operates.

Sir Sandy went further by saying that although the LGA is supportive of the work that HSE has done to reduce the number of deaths in the workplace, he is particularly concerned about HSE’s

interpretation of new legislation emerging from the European Union and whether there are 'gold plating' issues.

Sir Sandy said that he had informally canvassed a number of Chief Executives of local authorities as part of his preparation for this speech and that the responses he received ranged from those who "politely" said that they found HSE to be "over-zealous" to those who described HSE personnel as "officious". He said that, unlike in other areas of inspection, there did not seem to be a sense that local authorities looked to HSE as a potentially useful source of help and assistance.

Sir Sandy completed his speech by raising the concern that HSE may be blocking public bodies from developing services that are "personalised" to meet the need of the modern service user, due to concerns as to whether health and safety could be adequately assured in situations where services might be delivered by multiple providers. He gave the example of difficulties that his own Kent County Council has encountered introducing a 'Smartcard' system for service users to illustrate his point.

Sir Sandy ended by saying that he hoped that the LGA would be able to develop a closer working relationship with HSC to take forward thinking on the range of issues that he raised.

Carol Undy

Carol Undy said that the FSB is currently running a large-scale survey with its members in which they have posed questions on a number of issues relating to health and safety. She promised to share the results of this survey with HSC.

Ms Undy emphasised that small businesses are not risk averse and that she feels that most small businesses are supportive of effective health and safety policies. However, she went on to say that many small businesses were suffering under the weight of the "cumulative effect" of different regulations.

She ended by saying that she hopes that an "ever-closer" partnership between HSE and the FSB will develop in the future.

Judith Donovan

Judith Donovan made a forceful speech arguing that trivial coverage should not be allowed to taint the 'brand' of health and safety and the action HSE takes to protect workers. She stressed that the ultimate aim of the risk debate was to help reduce the number of work-based injuries and fatalities. 235 work based fatalities occurred last year. She now understands these issues but worries about the challenge in communicating to small businesses with messages that they will find compelling.

She spoke of the Transco gas explosion and the death of four workers by a runaway trolley at Tebay as prime examples of why the work of HSE is as relevant as ever. She then went on to give a more detailed explanation of the situation in Yorkshire, to demonstrate the 'on the ground' situation.

Judith Donovan then commented directly to Sir Sandy that local authorities also need to improve their behaviour and play a balanced part in the development of sensible risk in practice, alongside HSE.

Questions

A range of intelligent contributions were received from the floor, including comments questioning the length of time that it has taken to engender a health and safety culture in the UK.

A number of questioners raised the issue of the level of public responsibility for actions and whether members of the public needed to re-discover a greater sense of personal responsibility.

Tim Boswell completed the question session by saying that he wants to see an increased emphasis in the future on occupational health issues and hopes that HSC will work with Parliamentarians to develop a greater understanding of the importance of OH issues to the UK's future economic development.