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## HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

### BACKS! 2005 CAMPAIGN - FINAL REPORT

A Paper by Heather Bryant and John Price

Cleared by Jane Willis on 25 September 2006

#### Issue

1. To report on the success of the Backs! 2005 campaign.

#### Timing

2. Routine.

#### Recommendation

3. That the Commission note the successful outcome of Backs! 2005.

#### Background

4. The rationale behind the Backs! 2005 campaign, and key facts and figures, were outlined in 'The Health Agenda' paper discussed at HSC's 5 September meeting (HSC/06/71, Annex 2, refers). This paper expands on some of the issues involved.
5. Backs! 2005 was launched with the aim of promoting effective measures for managing back pain, and reducing manual handling injuries at work, including the provision and use of lifting aids. One of the largest campaigns of its type, it involved three major interventions (inspection, communications/media, and stakeholder engagement) and an extensive contribution – including partnership working with HSE – by Local Authorities. The communications and inspection interventions peaked in June-July 2005, but substantial amounts of stakeholder activity continued throughout the rest of the year.
6. This year, the campaign will resume with "Better Backs" (and, thereafter, we have plans for a further roll-out in late 2007/08). Launching in October, "Better Backs" will address back pain from all angles – as with Backs! 2005, it will focus both on reducing the risk of manual handling injuries and on mitigating the effects of back pain (by

promoting the “Stay active with back pain” message). But, additionally, it will include a new emphasis on Managing Sickness Absence & Return To Work.

## Argument

7. The selection of back pain for campaigning purposes flowed naturally from the HSC Strategy and from the nature of back pain itself. Back pain is one of the largest and most persistent occupational health problems but – by its very nature – is not confined to the workplace; ie, it is found in all sections of society. That said, although the causes of back pain are many and varied, the advice on the effective management of back pain will often be similar whatever the context.
8. Against this background, it was clear that we needed a broad-based Backs! campaign and one which, in practice, embraced much of the thinking in the HSC Strategy; ie, a heavy emphasis on Local Authority-HSE partnership working, on stakeholder engagement more broadly, on selective and targeted use of inspection, and on large-scale communication activity.
9. Backs! 2005 achieved considerable success on all these fronts. Particularly worthy of note are:
  - i) the size and scope of the campaign. It included:
    - nearly 500 HSE Inspectors and Local Authority Environmental Health Officers, undertaking over 4,000 visits between them;
    - a nationwide publicity campaign, conducted through national and trade press, national radio, online and PR;
    - the active participation of 39 National Stakeholders, including major employers, trade unions, trade associations, and charities;
    - 80 stakeholder events organised with the support of the campaign’s “stakeholder budget”.
  - ii) the numbers of people the campaign reached. Quite apart from the extensive publicity campaign, the National Stakeholders had the potential to reach around 10 million workers, while there were an estimated 500,000+ workers at locations visited for the inspection campaign;
  - iii) the immediate impact of the campaign – including:
    - 39% of employers and 32% of workers surveyed recalled the publicity campaign – of these 46% of employers stated they would take action;
    - 51% of a sample of follow-up inspection visits demonstrated clear improvements in manual handling procedures;
    - case study results from National Stakeholders suggest reductions in MSD sickness absence and incidents ranging between 10 and 93%.
10. Naturally, there is much still to do (and much still to learn – the Backs! 2005 preparations, for example, placed heavy pressure on our stakeholders and planning team

alike – underlining the need to build far more planning time into our future campaigns). Nonetheless, Backs! 2005 was a considerable success in its own right – the challenge now is to make that success “stick” and keep the momentum going. Behaviours are not changed overnight.

### **Consultation**

11. The report has been cleared within HSE, with LACORS (Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services), and with the Backs! 2005 national stakeholders listed at Annex 6 of the report.

### **Presentation**

12. The report is being published this month to keep it distinct from this year’s Better Backs campaign (starting on 9 October). It will be available on the HSE website and also distributed through the LACORS network.

### **Costs and Benefits**

13. The report includes some valuable case studies, where substantial savings have been made. They do not however lend themselves to any estimate of overall savings from Backs! 2005.

### **Financial/Resource Implications for HSE**

14. Backs! 2005 deployed over £3.3M of HSE resource – including £1.84M publicity spend and £1.29M inspector/HSAO/specialist/project team salary spend.

### **Environmental Implications**

15. None

### **Other Implications**

16. For this year’s Better Backs campaign, care has been taken to ensure that our interventions in Wales will not clash with “Welsh Backs” – the Welsh Assembly Government’s major public health initiative. Similar considerations apply to Scotland, where the Working Backs Scotland campaign has already done much to promote “stay active with back pain”.

### **Action**

17. To note.