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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

The Noise and Hand-arm Vibration Programme

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Issue

1. An update on activity to reduce exposure to noise and hand-arm vibration (HAV) at work.

Timing

2. Routine.

Recommendation

3. That Commissioners note the paper.

Background

4. This paper outlines the activity of the HSE's Noise and Hand-arm Vibration Programme to work with stakeholders to reduce the levels of exposure to noise and hand-arm vibration which should in the long-term reduce the incidence of noise-induced hearing loss and hand-arm vibration syndrome¹ (HAVS) arising from work activities.

5. The Programme capitalises on the recent introduction of the Control of Noise at Work Regulations (CNWR) and the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations (CVWR) (introduced in 2005). This paper complements other papers provided on the Fit3 Strategic Programme including the Health Agenda and the Injuries Reduction Programme.

¹ This paper does not deal with whole-body vibration (WBV). Although part of the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations, WBV is covered by the MSD Programme.

Argument

6. Noise-induced hearing loss and HAVS are still among the most common and enduring causes of ill health and disability at work. Over 2 million people in Britain are regularly exposed to loud noise at work, with 1.1 million exposed to a possible significant risk to health and an estimated 170,000 people suffer deafness, tinnitus or other ear conditions as a result of exposure at work.

7. About 5 million people in Britain are regularly exposed to HAV at work with 2 million at risk of developing disease. About 800,000 people have some symptoms of vibration white finger (one form of HAVS) and 300,000 people have advanced symptoms of the disease. Vibration White Finger and occupational deafness remain in the top third for industrial injury prescribed diseases.

8. HSE has been campaigning on both noise and HAV over the past 10 years most notably through the Good Health is Good Business Campaign in the mid 1990s. Physical Agents Directives on noise and vibration saw the introduction of new requirements for the control of noise and vibration at work. In the UK these Directives were implemented in 2005 through the CNWR and the CVWR. These new regulations have provided a clear regulatory framework for employers to manage these hazards and have been instrumental in stimulating a renewed interest and impetus to control risks in this area. The Noise and HAV Programme aims to capitalise on the current raised levels of awareness and concern in industry.

9. The long latency characteristics of ill health conditions associated with noise and hand-arm vibration mean that it is not possible for the Programme to directly contribute to the short-term Fit3 PSA targets as even immediate compliance with the regulations will not show as reduced incidence of ill health for some 5 to 10 years. However, the Programme has set long-term goals to control as an occupational disease the incidence of HAVS sufficiently to enable workers to remain at work without disability and to eliminate as an occupational disease the incidence of occupational noise-induced hearing damage. The Programme is monitoring indicators of exposure over the PSA period and has set its objectives and surrogate targets to reflect this.

10. The objective of the Noise and HAV Programme for the period 2006/7 – 2007/8 is:

- to promote and support the reduction and control of noise and HAV exposures from equipment and processes in priority sectors, and thereafter in all relevant industries, in order to reduce the associated new cases of ill health attributed to noise and HAV exposure.

11. For this period the Programme has set a surrogate target to:

- by the end of 2007/8 reduce workers' exposure to the risks posed by noise and HAV in the workplace by increasing the reported levels of specific compliant behaviour by 5% from the Fit3 Baseline of 2004/5.

12. The surrogate measures of compliant behaviour monitor the extent to which employers act to follow the Regulations and apply controls to reduce exposure.

Programme content and intervention selection

13. The Programme's objectives are being delivered through three complementary work streams to:

- reduce hazards at source through influencing the supply and design of tools and machinery and improve access to information on safe use;
- reduce exposure to noise and hand-arm vibration through encouraging compliance with CNWR and CVWR through advice, inspection and enforcement and promotion of good industry practice; and
- reduce exposure to noise and hand-arm vibration through encouraging workers and employers to work together to control risks.

14. The Programme's main focus of activity is with manufacturing and construction industries which are both HSE enforced. Processes within these industries represent the greatest risks from both noise and HAV. Targeting these industries ensure the most effective use of resources and provides the best opportunity to have an impact upon the small number of key processes responsible for the most significant levels of exposure.

15. The Noise and HAV Programme has used the HSC strategy to frame its interventions and has developed close partnerships with several key HSE stakeholders to deliver this work including working with the Hire Association of Europe (HAE) and Executive Hire News to promote good practice to reduce HAV exposure through the supply chain, supporting two very successful industry led conferences and assisting in the development of a supply chain based project in the construction sector. With the EEF (a key HSC/E partner) we have delivered 16 country wide Roadshows on the regulations to a total audience of over 1500 employers, managers, health and safety professionals and safety representatives and we are continuing this partnership to promote good practice in other ways.

16. The Programme has also promoted effective management of noise and HAV working with several stakeholders (including ACAS, EEF, Construction Confederation, FMB, UCATT, and GMB) to launch over 25 worker involvement pilots with companies from Portsmouth to Glasgow covering around 6,000 workers in construction, manufacturing and motor vehicle repair. These are encouraging employers and employees to work together to deliver improvements in the control of hand-arm vibration exposure and to promulgate lessons from this.

17. HSE field forces are delivering an enforcement led inspection programme on the management of HAV and noise in target industries in manufacturing and construction. This is supported by accessible advice and support on the management of HAV and noise including both website and other published materials on good practice controls for the management of HAV exposure. This programme of activity was launched with the support of EEF and AMICUS to over 40 industry stakeholders in July 2006.

18. The Noise and HAV Programme is also supporting a working group of music and entertainment stakeholders to develop practical guidance on controlling noise in this sector in preparation for the Regulations coming into force in this sector in April 2008. This has included coordinating and evaluating the piloting of draft

guidance with typical workplaces in the industry. The draft guidance is to go out to consultation in February this year and is described in HSC Paper HSC/07/08.

Working with local authorities

19. As indicated in paragraph 14 the Programme is currently focusing all its resources on the construction and manufacturing sectors, which are both HSE enforced and have the highest incidence of noise induced hearing loss and HAVS. Currently the Programme is not directly targeting action within the local authority enforced sector. However as the Programme matures other areas for intervention will be identified and opportunities for partnership working with Local authorities to promote the control risks from noise or HAV in the local authority enforced sector will be explored. This will be particularly so from April 2008 when the music and entertainment sector comes within scope of the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005. The Programme is already in discussions with LACORS about the best way to promote industry specific guidance on the control of noise in this sector (see paper HSC/07/08).

Consultation

20. Within HSE.

Presentation

21. Industry stakeholders take a close interest in noise and hand-arm vibration risks and the Noise and HAV Programme has used this interest to deliver events or to support initiatives to raise awareness and promote good practice. The Minister also has an interest in the Programme, especially with respect to the management of noise at work and has been regularly updated on the development of the guidance for the music and entertainment sector.

Financial/resource implications for HSE

22. The Noise and HAV Programme is brigaded under the Injuries Reduction Programme and as such its resource allocation forms part of Fit3. The Programme's position in IRP is used to maximise cross-working with the Safety Unit and the Manufacturing Sector and its stakeholder networks. The Programme also works closely with the Construction Sector and its stakeholders. Resources for the delivery of the Programme are also drawn from the FOD's Noise and Vibration Specialist Pool of Inspectors and the Corporate Medical Unit. The total planned staff resource allocation for the programme in 06/07 was approximately £1,690,000 (full economic cost) of which £945,000 represents programme directed inspection activity by FOD regulatory inspectors, health and safety awareness officers and occupational health inspectors.

23. The Noise and HAV Programme has focused its communications budget on joint work with HSE sectors and external stakeholders, especially the EEF to deliver messages on the Regulations and raise awareness of noise and vibration risks. These activities are highlighted in annex1. Planned communications spend in 06/07 is £60,000. The programme has commissioned research of approximately £500,000

in 06/07 to evaluate the impact of the Programmes projects; to improve our understanding of health surveillance and the guidance we provide on this and to improve our understanding of exposure risks from hand-held tools and other equipment so that this information can be used to advise dutyholders and enforcers.

24. The estimated resources to support the programme in 2007/08 are broadly similar.

Environmental Implications

25. None

Other Implications

26. None

Action

27. To note.

Projects and activities in the Noise and Vibration Programme

Reducing Hazards at source: supply of tools and machinery

Aims:

- Encourage manufacturers to alter/improve the designs of tools/machinery so as to reduce likely exposure to noise and HAV during use.
- Work with manufacturers and suppliers so that they provide accurate, user-friendly information on how their tools should be used to avoid hazardous exposures to noise and vibration above the exposure limit values.

Progress and future activities

- Written to over 200 identified manufacturers and suppliers and visiting up to 70 of these to assess compliance with duties under the Supply of Machinery (Safety) Regulations (SMSR) and to advise on the provision of information to end users about noise and vibration risks.
- Working (through Construction Sector) with stakeholders in the construction supply chain to improve the availability of HAV exposure data to end-users and to develop a HAV management tool to facilitate assessment and selection of hand tools on construction sites.
- Working with stakeholders such as Executive Hire News, Hire Association Europe and others to promote good practice in the supply of tools and equipment to minimise risks from noise and vibration
- Commissioned research into real life use noise and vibration exposures for selected machinery and hand tools. This will support guidance to enforcing authorities and dutyholders.
- Increasing numbers of suppliers and manufacturers provide real use data on vibration emissions from their tools and equipment.
- Increasing numbers of suppliers and manufacturers provide free guidance and or training on the control of noise and hand arm vibration risks this includes web-based guidance and the promotion of HSE guidance.
- In 07/08 the outcomes of the inspection programme will be promulgated through a report and a selection of case studies highlighting main findings and promoting good practice in the supply of equipment and information to end users.

Encouraging compliance through advice, investigation and enforcement

Aims:

- Encourage and support employers and employees to comply with their responsibilities so far as is reasonably practicable under the new Regulations.
- Promote known good practice controls on noise and hand arm vibration and to develop and promulgate new controls where these are necessary.

Progress and future activities

- In partnership with the EEF delivered 16 Noise and Vibration Roadshows which reached more than 1500 delegates using innovative drama based workshops to promote discussion of risks.
- Launched with the support of the EEF, AMICUS and other stakeholders a web-based suite of good practice controls for reducing exposure to hand-arm vibration in foundries, fabrication and construction, these have received positive feedback and endorsement from main stakeholders.
- Directed enforcement activity in these sectors to promote the good practice controls and to ensure they are used by dutyholders so far as is reasonably practicable (with emphasis on HAV in 2006/7 and noise in 2007/8).
- Targeted stakeholder engagement and communications activity to promote the good practice controls in relevant sectors including presentations, articles and other promotional activity.
- Over 300,000 visitors to the noise and vibration pages of the HSE website since the regulations were laid and nearly 500,000 sales of noise and vibration free and priced guidance on the Regulations.
- During 07/08 the Programme will continue to promote these controls and bring into focus action to promote noise controls targeting key construction and manufacturing industries.

Encouraging compliance through worker involvement

Aim

- Encourage employers and employees to work together to assess and control noise and vibration risks through a series of industry based pilots on worker involvement

Progress and future activities

- Launched in partnership with the EEF, the Construction Confederation the FMB, UCATT and GMB worker involvement pilots in the construction and manufacturing sectors.
- Held a worker involvement training event for representatives from the pilot companies with Commissioner Hugh Robertson providing a keynote speech and speakers from ACAS, GMB and others.
- Partnership with EEF, Construction Confederation, FMB, relevant trade unions and ACAS to provide training, guidance and mentor support to the pilots
- There are now a total of 25 pilots in operation covering 6000 at risk employees across 3 industry sectors (construction, manufacturing and motor vehicle repair). A further 5 construction SMEs are expected to have joined the project before the end of 2006.
- Following the conclusion of the pilot phase the pilots will be evaluated and any lessons learned and other materials and case studies developed will be rolled out to target sectors.

Industry led guidance for the Music and Entertainment sector

Aims

- Work with a stakeholder group in the music and entertainment sectors to prepare, pilot, and consult upon sector specific guidance on the Control of Noise at Work Regulations, to be published in December 2007.

Progress and future activities

- Support to industry stakeholders' working group including representatives from orchestras, production companies, military bands, pubs and clubs and sector unions;
- Draft guidance to provide advice on risk assessment and control in the live music and entertainment sector has been developed and piloted with a small number of typical venues,
- Findings of these pilots have been incorporated as necessary into the development of the draft guidance.
- Guidance to be consulted upon in Spring 2007 and the final guidance to be published in December 2007, at least 3 months prior to the date at which these Regulations come into force for this sector.
- Programme is working with LACORS to identify ways of raising awareness on the guidance and the coming into force of the Regulations in this sector in preparation for April 2008. This will focus on pubs and clubs especially where impact of the Regulations is likely to be most felt.