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ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES

Update on Partnership Teams A paper by Jenny Hagan

The Respiratory Diseases Unit within the Long Latency Health Risks Division (LLHRD) are working on a 'Dust and Fumes Project', which aims to reduce the incidents of respiratory disease by raising awareness of the long term health effects of inhaling dust and fumes in the workplace. Using information gathered over a number of years, five 'high risk' industries have been identified for targeted campaigns – stoneworking, construction, foundries, quarries and welding. These five 'projects' will be managed and developed by individual 'partnership teams' comprising of those individuals having the capacity and influence to drive forward change within those five sectors.

Insight research: HSE has commissioned research into the attitudes and behaviours of welders, foundry workers, quarry workers, stone workers and construction workers on dust, vapours, gases and fumes (and noise and vibration). Initial insight findings are being fed back to the partnership teams for discussion, to help develop communications with the target audiences. This insight should provide the information needed to identify key issues, highlight similarities and differences in sectors, and assist the partnership teams in developing appropriate communications messages and delivery routes.

Stoneworkers: There are approximately 8000 stoneworkers in Great Britain, but exposure to dust and specifically Respirable Crystalline Silica (RCS) dust is high due to workers using stone with a high silica content. The stoneworker partnership team (SPT) provides representation from stakeholders with a high level of interest in the industry and health and safety consultants. The first team meeting was held in March 2010, where partners discussed and agreed the scope of the project, including the term 'Stonemason' being replaced by 'Stoneworker' as it was felt that some workers could be excluded (i.e. those working on kitchen worktops). The focus of the project was agreed as the dangers associated with the inhalation of 'all dusts' with specific attention upon RCS dust. A second meeting held in June 2010 further developed how to progress the project further.

Construction: There is a total working population of 2,000,000 in the construction industry and due to its complexities and size the Construction Project has formed an internal working group to refine the focus of the project. The group have met twice and agreed to recommend that the project focus on:

- the Refurbishment Sector
- the dangers related to the inhalation of RCS because it is the most significant respiratory risk after asbestos.
- seven high risk tasks where there is a high risk of exposure to RCS cutting, drilling, sanding, cleaning/sweeping, chiselling, surface preparation and interior demolition – by hand.

The next steps are to begin identifying external stakeholders by their influence and interest in relation to the project aims and objectives. The Partnership Team will consist of representatives from training organisations, trade associations, trade unions, suppliers & tool hire companies and contractors. The remit of the partnership will be clarified at the first meeting, which is planned to take place in autumn 2010.

Foundries: There are approximately 450 foundries, employing around 24,500 workers. Companies tend to be small scale, and almost half employ fewer than 50 people. Evidence suggests that there is a poor level of awareness within the sector regarding the health risks posed by exposure to dust and fumes, particularly amongst workers. It is expected that additional stakeholders will be involved at different times depending on the areas of focus and further advice will be taken from the partnership team, e.g. there is currently only one representative from the supply side on the team. The first foundries partnership team (FPT) meeting was held in March 2010. A second meeting held in June 2010 further developed how to progress the project further.

Quarries: There are 1300 quarries in the UK and information suggests that around 35,000 employees are potentially exposed to RCS. The Quarries Partnership Team (QPT) includes representatives from industry trade associations, five major UK Quarry operators, Union Representatives from GMB and Unite and from the Quarries National Advisory Committee. The QPT met for the first time in February 2010, when members agreed that ‘dust’ was an issue in the industry and that the scope of the project should be general ‘dust’ rather than ‘RCS dust’. An online web community has been created and is now available for the QPT to share information/guidance, best practice and to hold discussions. Discussions are on going to decide the best way forward, specifically how raise awareness of the risks and create changes in perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of workers. The second Partnership Team meeting was hosted by a member of the partnership team on the 1st July 2010 to determine a plan to move forward with future activities.

Welding: There are approximately 79,000 workers exposed to constituents of welding fume. Welders are employed by the engineering and metal working industries but a lot of welding occurs on an *ad hoc* basis occurs in SMEs. At the first welding partnership team (WPT) on 5 March 2010, the team agreed its scope as “respiratory hazards in a welding and cutting environment.” A second meeting was held on 27 May 2010 and a further meeting is scheduled for October 2010 to determine a plan to move forward with future activities.