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ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES

Availability of occupational ill health statistics

A paper by Kate Sweeney

Issues

1. HSE is proposing to reintroduce annual work-related ill health questions into the Labour Force Survey.
2. HSE is looking into the feasibility of publishing a provisional Mesothelioma death figure alongside the publication of injury fatalities in July.

Background – Ill health data from the LFS

3. In 2011, following a public consultation about statistics priorities, HSE took the decision to reduce the frequency of work-related ill health questions in the Labour Force Survey from annual to biennial. This decision was taken by balancing up the available data we held at the time, the current priorities and costs.
4. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a key source of data on work-related illness and workplace injury. We have run an annual series of injury questions on the LFS since 1993/94 and work-related illness questions since 2003/04 (and periodically before that).
5. When HSE took the decision to reduce frequency of the ill health data it was on the expectation that alternative sources of data on ill health could be developed. However, this has not been possible. Furthermore, there is an increasing demand for performance data following the Triennial Review and external stakeholders have expressed concern at the reduced frequency of the data.
6. In light of these factors, HSE is now proposing to return to an annual series and is in the process seeking financial approval for this.

Background – Release of Mesothelioma data

7. HSE has two main statistics releases each year: fatal injuries are published in July and all other data including occupational ill health and enforcement are published in the autumn.
8. We are considering the feasibility of changing the fatal injury release in July into a fatality release which includes both injuries and asbestos-

related deaths. This idea has external user support but would require the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to provide us with death certificate data more quickly than they do at present. We are pursuing this idea with the ONS and hope to be able to announce our release plans shortly.