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**HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION AND EXECUTIVE  
AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**Lessons learned from HSE Better Backs 2006 campaign**

**Summary**

1 This paper provides AIAC members with a brief summary on the lessons learned and recommendations from HSE's Better Backs 2006 campaign.

**Background**

2 At previous committee meetings, AIAC members had shown an interest in feedback the Better Backs campaign within the Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSD) programme given the high MSD prevalence rate of injuries in agriculture and working days lost. MSDs are the most common occupational ill-health condition in Great Britain, affecting 1.0 million people a year.

3 BMRB (British Market Research Bureau) Media had also undertaken some evaluation of the Backs 2006 media campaign. This suggested that running several campaign messages at once had been confusing for the audience and advised that sticking to a preventive or a return to work, or a stay active message (but not all three at the same time) might be more effective. The general lessons learned from the campaign was that while we have evidence that we have achieved success in raising immediate awareness, as with other government experience, change in behavior will only come from sustained campaigns over a number of years (cf DFT campaign on road safety).

**Presentation**

**Stakeholder strand**

4 The Health and Safety Laboratory (HSL) has done a small qualitative evaluation of the **stakeholder** element of the campaign. They interviewed 11 organisations that had held Better Backs 2006 or Backs 2005 events and asked them how it had been received and what they got out of it. These were five public, five private and one voluntary organisation.

5 The following conclusions were drawn:

- (1) whether or not funding was received from HSE to support the event was immaterial; and
- (2) stakeholders were using the Better Backs events to address the wider health and safety agenda.

6 HSE learnt that two events which were cancelled for lack of interest had focused entirely on back pain. A wider Health and Safety agenda is needed to encourage attendance. One lesson not mentioned by HSL, but which we are aware of, is that participants at these days or half days expected to be given a information pack of some kind.

7 HSL recommendations were:

- (1) Future campaigns should include a more diverse range of issues embracing the wider HSE health and safety agenda;
- (2) Future campaigns should communicate clearly to small and medium sized enterprises the economic and organisational benefits of addressing backs related issues;
- (3) Identifying and recruiting “gateway” stakeholders i.e. stakeholders that can help HSE gain access to many other organisations that might otherwise prove difficult to reach is a useful component;
- (4) Build in evaluation methodologies and criteria at the early planning stage.

8 The idea of “gateway stakeholders” is an interesting concept. The example of Southern Water was used, where the company, which employs many small sub-contractors, was able to target this difficult to reach groups by holding an event specifically for them.

9 HSE also has a discussion forum running on the MSD pages in which people can exchange ideas and tips on MSD prevention and return to work. Farmers, who have a computer, might be interested in registering on the forum.

### **Inspection strand**

10 The lessons learned from the inspection strand of the campaign were mainly to do with organisation of the campaign and probably not relevant in terms of success of the campaign messages. Participation was patchy across the regions and there was clearly difficulty in identifying the truly poor performers, which HSE’s Field Operations Directorate (FOD) had hoped to do.

## **Backs 2007-08**

11 There will be another stakeholder campaign in 2007-08 with funding provided to HSE regions and Local Authorities (LAs) to host Better Backs events, but no funding to other organisations. HSE are producing a stakeholder pack with material on Manual Handling (MH), return to work and MH training. HSE will be targeting the health sector and those industries identified through the Moving Goods Safety (MGS) campaign, so agriculture would only feature if representatives came to one of the events organised regionally. There will be a small inspection campaign (6 HSE staff years) in January/February which will be devoted to piloting the new risk assessment tool for repetitive tasks - provided it is ready in time. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing received only 1.4% of the visits in 2006, so is unlikely to feature widely in 2008. The plans for the media strand have yet to be finalised, but it will probably be trade and industry based.

## **Effectiveness of manual handling training**

12 This research was commissioned by HSE and run by Loughborough University (Cheryl Haslam, Professor of Health Psychology), following a tender exercise. HSE was concerned that some employers were sending staff on manual handling training courses as a substitute for proper risk assessment and control, effectively pushing all the responsibility for preventing injury onto the workers. In addition, although the Manual handling Operations Regulations required training to be given, HSE did not provide prescriptive guidance on what a good manual handling training course should include or how long it should last.

13 Loughborough University carried out a very thorough literature review, phone interviews of 120 employers and 30 MH trainers and ran two focus groups of trainers and employers. Their findings, in brief, were that training should place more emphasis on changing attitudes and behaviour and promoting risk awareness among workers and managers. The research found little evidence that manual handling training focussing on lifting techniques alone was effective in promoting safer working practices and reducing manual handling injuries. Techniques taught in manual training programmes often failed to translate to the workplace. There was evidence that training workers and managers to assess risk and report problems, was effective in reducing manual handling injuries. There was strong evidence that ergonomic interventions that adopted a multi-dimensional approach, including both the tailoring of training to suit the person and task, along with equipment or task design/redesign, were effective in reducing manual handling injuries.

14 These findings suggest that one aspect of the work to reduce MSDs in agriculture would be to focus on making workers carry out risk assessment before carrying out a MH (or any other) task so that this becomes second nature amongst employees and employers, rather than concentrating solely on techniques that may or may not avoid injury.

## **Conclusion**

15 Subject to the availability of resources to continue this work the lessons learnt would suggest:

- (1) identify gateway stakeholders and work through them over a period of time to reach farmers and farm labourers;
- (2) future events held by stakeholders will need to include topics other than just MSDs in order to attract attendees;
- (3) work with manual handling trainers should develop and deepen their curriculum and approach; and
- (4) publicity and promotional work should keep to a single message if using media such as radio or press adverts - direct mail is different.

## **Action**

16 Members are asked to note the content of this paper.

### Contact

David Lewis or Alastair Mitchell (Ag & Food Sector)  
HSE - Health and Work Division  
8SW, Rose Court  
0207 717 6290