

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

**Update on AIAC proposal to form a working group to address
musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)**

Summary

1 The purpose of this paper is to provide AIAC members with an update on progress to form a working group to address the issue of MSDs in agriculture/horticulture.

Background

2 At the seventh meeting of AIAC held on 2 May 2007 members expressed a desire to convene a working group to tackle this issue. A number of previous efforts to form such a group had been unsuccessful but it was agreed by members that a further attempt should be made.

Outcomes

3 Invitations to form a working group were sent to AIAC members by email on 14 May 2007. Members were asked:

- (1) whether they wished to become a member of the working group and
- (2) if they were willing to attend a meeting of the working group in order to explore more fully what the group might contribute. Examples of successful outcomes from HSE's agriculture sector project on MSDs were included with the invitation as a basis for stimulating discussion. Members were asked to submit a response by 31 May 2007. A total of 4 responses were received. From these replies, only two members were able to commit to providing resources for an MSD working group.

4 Due to the apparent lack of AIAC resource available to take forward this initiative, (and following an appraisal of the situation from within the AIAC secretariat), members were again contacted by email (17 September 2007) and informed that:

(1) The level of resource was considered to be insufficient to justify forming a working group at this stage and

(2) Members were invited to contribute towards promoting new training courses and certificates of competence in manual handling developed by HSE working collaboratively with awarding bodies in the land based sector. A promotional article outlining this work had been drafted by HSE and sent to members as an attachment to the email. This article is reproduced at annex one.

5 To date, two responses concerning this request have been received with one member able to confirm the inclusion of the article within a forthcoming stakeholder newsletter.

Action/Recommendations

6 Members are asked to note the content of this paper as the basis for discussion on the way forward.

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NEW TRAINING AND CERTIFICATES OF COMPETENCE TO HELP LAND BASED WORKERS CARRY OUT SAFE LIFTING

New training courses to prevent the risk of manual handling injury in farming and horticulture have been produced with the support of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are the most common occupational illness in Great Britain, affecting 1.0 million people a year. They include problems such as low back pain, joint injuries and repetitive strain injuries of various sorts.

In agriculture and horticulture, back injuries are common. Although mechanical handling has eliminated some manual handling tasks, there are still many intermittent or seasonal activities where MSDs are a potential problem. If this work is not carried out safely using good techniques, there is often a risk of sustaining a serious injury.

In response to these concerns, HSE has worked closely with land-based organisations Lantra Awards and NPTC to help develop training and qualifications for farmers and workers. These developments have incorporated the latest thinking on the principles of safe lifting following research work done by the Institute of Occupational Medicine.

Lantra Awards have developed a suite of new training packages as part of their technical awards. Two of the courses, "Manual handling awareness" and "Safe lifting techniques (with problem solving)" are highly participative courses designed to provide candidates with an awareness of the risks associated with manual handling and how the use of safe techniques can help reduce the likelihood of injury.

For the first time, there is also a training course aimed at employers, managers and supervisors. This one day course, entitled "Practical Manual Handling for Managers and Supervisors", includes the requirements of The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992, how to use HSE's manual handling assessment charts to help carry out risk assessments, and solutions to typical manual handling problems including the use of lifting aids.

NPTC have also carried out a comprehensive revision of their certificates of competence in manual handling. Two certificates are offered:

The level 1 certificate in safe manual handling (safe operator) contains two units; an awareness of safe lifting techniques and how to lift and move a load safely.

The level 2 certificate in safe manual handling operations (risk assessment) requires an ability to carry out risk assessment for manual handling activities. Both certificates, which are assessed by suitably qualified NPTC registered staff,

require candidates to be able to demonstrate knowledge of safe lifting techniques.

Alastair Mitchell, from HSE's Agriculture and Food Sector said "Although the nature of agricultural work has changed over the years due to increased mechanisation, farmers and farm workers are still at risk of sustaining serious MSDs. The use of safe lifting techniques is an essential tool in helping to reduce that risk and it will also enable farmers and workers to comply with their legal duties. Most importantly, it should also help reduce unnecessary suffering"

Notes to editors:

1. Results from the latest survey of self-reported work-related illness (SWI04/05) indicate that in 2004/05 an estimated prevalence of 1 012 000 people in Great Britain suffered from a musculoskeletal disorder which, in their opinion, was caused or made worse by their current or past work. For more details see www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/musc.htm
2. Lantra Awards and NPTC (part of the City and Guilds group) specialise in training and qualifications for people in the land-based sector through a network of local approved centres and training providers. For full details contact Lantra Awards on 024 7641 9703 or see www.lantra-awards.co.uk and for NPTC telephone 024 7685 7300 or see www.nptc.org.uk
3. The outcomes of research carried out for HSE by The Institute of Occupational Medicine may be found in the publication The Principles of good manual handling: Achieving a consensus RR097 available from HSE books on 01787 881165 or from www.hsebooks.com
4. The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 require employers and the self-employed to: (i) avoid hazardous manual handling operations so far as is reasonably practicable (ii) make a suitable and sufficient assessment of any hazardous manual handling operations that cannot be avoided (iii) reduce the risk of injury from those operations so far as is reasonably practicable. The provision of suitable training in safe lifting techniques has an important part to play in reducing the risk of manual handling injury.
5. Section 2 of The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and regulations 10 and 13 of The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to provide their employees with health and safety information and training.