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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CONIAC)

Research into stress in construction

Summary

This paper informs CONIAC members of research by the Health and Safety Laboratory (HSL) 'An analysis of the prevalence and distribution of stress in the construction industry. Member are asked to note the contents and invited to assist the researchers by facilitating access to their organisations.

Issue

1. Addressing health issues is a key element of the Construction Priority Programme. In order to decide on what needs to be done we need to know the prevalence of occupational poor health in the industry.
2. Stress is one of the HSC/E's priority topics. There are low recorded rates in the construction industry but we believe the data is not accurate.
3. This research is intended to improve the robustness of the data by establishing the prevalence of work-related stress within the construction industry and identify and rank the key causes.

Timing

4. Work on the project began in April which is scheduled for completion in March 2006.

Background

5. Addressing health issues is a key element of the Construction Priority Programme. The health portfolio seeks amongst other things to create a cultural change in the industry. To do this adequately, we will need to identify the prevalence of occupational poor health and establish a benchmark for occupational health management thereby helping employers to reduce ill health through prevention, control and management.

6. The health issues recognised as an industry priority are Musculoskeletal Disorders, Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome, Noise Induced Hearing Loss, Dermatitis and Stress. However, more work is required to improve the robustness of the data on the incidence rate of work-related stress.

7. Various sources show the construction sector with below-average rates for stress, depression and anxiety. The robustness and representativeness of these figures are however poor as they are estimates based on sample groups of fewer than 30 people and rely on self reporting for which the construction industry is notoriously poor.

8. In contrast, articles have been published in various construction trade press which raise concern about the rate of suicide for construction workers

9. If work-related stress is present in construction it is likely to result, as in other industries in significant sickness absence. However, we need more robust and reliable figures on work-related stress to determine whether it is a significant issue within the industry. Once the key factors have been identified, they will provide a baseline from which both HSE and industry can work and target accordingly. This information will assist HSE and industry in establishing a benchmark for this health issue and making a positive contribution to the RHS targets for construction.

Current position and Next steps

10. The aim is to establish the prevalence of work-related stress within the construction industry, taking into account demographic factors such as job description, size of organisation and geographical location of the worker.

11. The objectives of the project are to:

- establish the prevalence of work-related stress within the construction industry;
- identify the key casual factors of work-related stress;
- rank the key factors taking into account the demographic information.

12. Given the apparent lack of formal consideration given to stress in the industry, it is important that industry stakeholders, employers and employees are consulted at the start of the project to gain an understanding of their perceptions of stress, how it is described, which parts of the industry experience most stress and most effective methods of gathering relevant prevalence data can be explored further with the industry.

13. The results of this initial consultation will inform the remaining stages of the project. These will focus on the five sectors considered to suffer from the highest levels of stress, which will be contacted, to explore prevalence and sources of stress in more detail.

14. The project will use HSE's Management Standards for stress as a basis, but will be adapted as necessary to fit the needs and special issues relevant to the industry.

Action

15. Members are invited to co-operate with the research by:

- agreeing to be interviewed as stakeholders;
- facilitating the distribution of questionnaires by providing access to employers and employees;
- facilitating access to employers and employees for interviews;
- supporting the research by publicising it.

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