



RUBIAC

The Newsletter of the Rubber Industry Advisory Committee

Rubber Industry Chief Executives meet at HSE's London HQ

A meeting of Chief Executives and their representatives from the rubber industry was held at the Health and Safety Executive's London headquarters on 22 March 2002. It was called to report back to the industry on progress with the RUBIAC three-year accident reduction initiative (the RUBIAC Action Plan) which started in June 1999. The meeting was chaired by Bill Callaghan, Chair of the Health and Safety Commission, who also gave an update on the Commission's priorities for revitalising health and safety.

RUBIAC Secretary, Chris Flint, gave a progress review on how the industry had done in its aim to achieve a 30% reduction in the annual accident rate and a reduction in manual handling accidents from 902 to below 500 per 100 000 employed. He reported that the forecast was for a 28.5% reduction in the annual accident rate by May

2002 and a 23.5% reduction in manual handling accidents, bringing the number down to 691 per 100 000 employed. He also told the audience that the majority of supporting activities to the Action Plan had been delivered by the industry, employees and HSE working in partnership.

Abid Dost, Director of Health, Safety and Environment at the British Rubber Manufacturers Association (BRMA), told delegates of the role BRMA had played in support of the Action Plan. Jim Marshall (GMB) gave a trade union view. He spoke about the benefits of employers and employees working in partnership, and illustrated this with examples and the accident reductions achieved.

Three industry representatives spoke about particular initiatives they had undertaken to progress the Action Plan in their own workplaces. Justine

Acheson, Michelin, spoke about their 'Champions of health and safety' initiative which gained senior managers' commitment and involves them in ensuring that Michelin's '7 habits of a highly safe factory' are implemented. Steve Howe, Polymer Sealing Solutions, told how his company had made good use of the RUBIAC recommended practice approaches to risk assessment and accident investigation. This was given as a good example of the industry working together as the ideas for the recommended practice approaches had come from the industry and been developed with them to the benefit of all. Lastly, David Vickers, British Vita, spoke of how his company had used HSE's safety climate tool to identify areas for improvement.

Chris Flint finished the event by presenting the views of RUBIAC on a new aim and objectives for a future industry-wide accident reduction initiative to build on the progress to date. The audience voted overwhelmingly to continue with an accident reduction plan to run from June 2002 to May 2005. The overall aim would be to reduce accidents by 30% from where they are now, which would bring the rubber industry into line with the 'general manufacturing' rate. They also supported the idea of stakeholders signing a pledge committing themselves to the plan and agreed to send in comments on the proposals.

Bill Callaghan said, 'The important thing is that we have a high level of commitment from key players in the industry to the continuation of a reduction plan. What we want to do now is get even more firms involved and supporting this plan. Getting companies to sign a pledge stating their support is an important way of cementing their commitment'.



Bill Callaghan, Chair of the Health and Safety Commission

BRMA health surveillance course

In June 2001, the British Rubber Manufacturers Association (BRMA) organised a one-day course at the National Motorcycle Museum in Birmingham to provide practical guidance for dealing with health surveillance issues in the rubber and polyurethane industries. BRMA wrote the course material in consultation with HSE's medical inspectors.

The course was attended by 50 participants from rubber and polyurethane companies. The topics covered included guidance on:

- setting up health surveillance;
- specific and general procedures in health surveillance management; and
- the implications of health surveillance on employee relations.

Feedback from participants showed they found the course very useful and the structured course material particularly informative. RUBIAC is considering how best to make this health surveillance guidance more widely available.

HSE Workplace Contact Officer project

Workplace Contact Officers visited all rubber manufacturing businesses registered with HSE in Yorkshire and the North East to assess the impact of the RUBIAC three-year Action Plan and the recommended practice approaches for manual handling and risk assessment.

Many of those contacted did not automatically associate themselves with the 'rubber industry'. Consequently, when they originally received the RUBIAC Action Plan, they felt no 'bond' with the industry as a whole, and didn't feel inclined to take ownership of it. This was particularly the case with smaller companies.

The companies who did accept ownership were larger companies or SMEs forming part of a larger group. There were however a few 'blind spots' where a more positive/informed response would be expected. A number of companies who had been sent a copy of the Action Plan claimed not to have seen it. Very few could

produce the Recommended Practice text. Overall, about half of the contacts claimed not to know about the Action Plan. More people claimed to have seen the RUBIAC Newsletter.

When asked if they had carried out manual handling assessments, most companies thought they had not. In fact they had been done and incorporated into machinery risk assessments. The main way of managing the issue was to provide training in lifting techniques. Companies visited typically had one to three of the processes covered by the manual handling case studies in the RUBIAC manual handling guidance. Most assessments were carried out by teams of managers and operatives.

RUBIAC is responding to the findings by looking at how to get greater industry ownership of any future industry-wide initiative as agreed at the meeting of Chief Executives (see front page article).

New EC project on rubber dust and fume

A new project 'Improved exposure assessment for prospective cohort studies and exposure control in the European rubber manufacturing industry' (EXASRUB) has recently begun. The countries participating are Holland, Germany, Sweden and UK. The BRMA is co-ordinating the work for the UK.

The goal of the project is to develop new insights into exposure controls

and exposure assessment in the European rubber manufacturing industry. Personal exposure measurements available in the four countries will be amalgamated into a common database which will provide information for constructing statistical exposure models for the rubber industry. It is hoped that working conditions will be improved by sharing knowledge on effective exposure controls.

RUBIAC rubber fume and dust monitoring guidance

In 2000, HSE published the results of a survey to assess exposure to rubber fume and rubber process dust in the UK general rubber goods, tyre manufacturing and retread industries. The study identified that in about 30% of the occupational hygiene reports produced by consultants, inappropriate advice might be being provided to rubber companies regarding exposure and the adequacy of controls for rubber fume and rubber process dust. As a consequence, Dr Abid Dost (BRMA) has produced draft RUBIAC guidance on monitoring rubber fume and rubber process dust.

The aim of the guidance is to ensure employers, and those responsible for commissioning exposure monitoring and receiving reports, are provided with:

- a practical checklist for the effective monitoring of rubber fume and rubber process dust; and
- information that helps to interpret the results so they can be used to achieve adequate control.

The guidance has been out for consultation and an updated draft is in preparation. Anyone wanting to comment on it should contact the RUBIAC Secretary at HSE, Marshalls Mill, Marshall Street, Leeds LS11 9YJ, Tel: 0113 283 4200 or e-mail: rubi.ac.area14@hse.gsi.gov.uk to request a copy.

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