

Health and Safety Executive Senior Management Team Paper SMT/09/109			
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HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

Senior Management Team

Development of a system to ensure the timely release of critical information, where necessary to prevent further loss of life, injury or ill health.

A Paper Nick Ratty

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Issue

1. HSE's Directorates do not have a uniform approach to the release of critical information or advice to the wider stakeholder community following an incident or other event.

Timing

2. For decision at the 7 October SMT.

Recommendation

3. That the SMT approves the attached paper for submission to the HSE Board.

Background

This paper seeks to advise the Board of the SMT's decision in respect of this issue following its consideration of paper SMT/09/92 at its September meeting. See the attached draft paper.

Health and Safety Executive Board		Paper No: HSE/09/	
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DEVELOPMENT OF A SYSTEM TO ENSURE THE TIMELY RELEASE OF CRITICAL INFORMATION, WHERE NECESSARY TO PREVENT FURTHER LOSS OF LIFE, SERIOUS INJURY OR ILL HEALTH			

Purpose of the paper

1. Further to Board paper HSE/09/24 the Board are requested to note the development of an HSE wide system, which will ensure that critical health and safety information and advice reaches the relevant audiences, including through the use of formal "health and safety bulletins" (such as safety alerts), where necessary. It will also guide HSE staff in deciding why and when such information and advice should be promulgated, and what and how it should be communicated.

Background

2. Findings from investigations or other triggers (e.g. research), occasionally require HSE to release critical information and advice to prevent further serious injury or ill health. This release may require dutyholders to respond immediately or take critical, but not urgent, action at key points (such as routine inspection or maintenance).
3. Individual Directorates and investigation teams have, to date, managed the release of such information in a targeted but ad hoc way, without the benefit of an overall HSE framework to support consistency in the thresholds for HSE action, consultation, clearance, formatting, and publicity.
4. The proposed mechanism originally arose from a wide-ranging project on product safety. Among other findings from the work, it was apparent that HSE's web-based formal health and safety bulletins could be difficult to locate. Our ability to feed reports into the European Union, and take action on reports emerging from the EU (e.g. on dangerous products) was also made more difficult because there was no agreed and straightforward means for us to promulgate the information.

Argument

5. In discussing HSE/09/24 at its February meeting, the HSE Board agreed that HSE's current policy objective of releasing critical information was sound, and accepted that this might compromise enforcement action on some occasions. However, experience has indicated that there is a risk that our current approach to releasing critical information and advice, may result in interested parties not being able to find it, or under/overestimating the importance of a particular issue or report. For critical information and advice placed on the web, current practice also does not support efficient notification systems using modern media e.g. email, RSS, SMS.
6. A framework of guidance will be provided to support decision making in this area. It will be aligned with current procedures to the greatest extent possible and build on existing good practice (for example in OSD and ND). It will include advice on:
 - When the release of critical information and advice may be appropriate;
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - Targeting and publication
 - An external webpage for formal health and safety bulletins
 - An internal webpage holding the guidance to staff, case studies etc;
 - Tracking and recording decisions.
7. The new system will retain the discretion not to release a formal bulletin where it is judged that other means will result in a more efficient and effective outcome, for example, where:
 - Existing formal or ad hoc industry arrangements will adequately promulgate the information;
 - A manufacturer is able to swiftly contact affected customers;

- Affected parties already have sufficient awareness and information to respond adequately, rendering a bulletin unnecessary.
8. There may be occasions when investigations and incidents in the Local Authority (LA) enforced sectors warrant some form of formal health and safety bulletin. The SMT has agreed that work to enable LAs to issue bulletins through HSE should commence once HSE's internal systems are proven.
 9. We propose to review and evaluate the functioning of the procedures and web platforms after a period of 12 to 18 months.

Consultation

10. Extensive consultation with operational and operational policy divisions has already taken place, as well as discussions with Unite the Union, who had particular concerns in this area. LACORS are content with the proposal.

Presentation

11. There is likely to be wide and significant interest from outside HSE therefore the launch of the external website (currently scheduled for late Autumn 2009) and ability to sign up for Bulletin notifications will be publicised via various media to target a wide range of stakeholders. Publicity will be arranged for the various industry sectors, and for stakeholder and partnership events.
12. The new internal web site will be publicised through normal internal communication routes - the key aspect being the 'one-stop-shop' for all guidance, procedures and templates required.

Costs and Benefits

13. There may be some small additional staff resource requirements beyond those currently required to issue a health and safety bulletin, as the proposed system has more developed requirements relating to consultation and clearance. There will also be ongoing staff costs to maintain the webpages. However there may also be offsetting savings because staff will not be designing ad hoc bespoke arrangements.
14. The main benefit will be the contribution to prevention of further incidents and additionally the protection and enhancement of HSE's reputation, through the release of critical information and advice in good time, using consistent and effective procedures and the release of formal bulletins on a single website location.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

15. The e-bulletin and text/SMS functionality has already been outsourced to government approved companies at modest cost.

Action

16. The Board are invited to note these developments.

Paper clearance

This paper was cleared by Kevin Myers, and the SMT at their October meeting

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