

**Bill Callaghan – keynote speech to the  
University of Cambridge Health and Safety  
Division Annual Safety Seminar**

**20 March 2007**

**Introduction**

My thanks to the University of Cambridge's Health and Safety Division for the invite to come and speak today. Equally importantly today provides the opportunity to hear your views on the major issues you are tackling to ensure risks associated with health and safety in the workplace are properly controlled.

Before I set out the issues I plan to address in my presentation I would like to make a few observations based on my brief look at the division's website and my reading of an interview with Sara in a recent edition of the Safety and Health Practitioner.

Clearly the risks that you and your colleagues face in the work you undertake within the university are wide-ranging – from risks to occupational health, to the safe containment of radioactive materials through to the disposal of biological and clinical waste. Employees, students and others can be affected by the university's activities. The commitment of the university to the achievement and maintenance of high standards of health and safety is key – as is having a culture which has top level commitment.

Sara talking about her role in the SHP interview stated,

“I have to be able to persuade very senior people to do things, so understanding what motivates academics is key to success.”

You are not alone – I am sure that much of the time of your colleagues, indeed the time of HSC/E too, is spent trying to change attitudes and behaviour at all levels to ensure that risks are effectively controlled.

I will be returning to the sensible management of risk and the importance of top level leadership later in my presentation, and this slide sets out the issues I intend to cover :

- State of health and safety in Great Britain & progress towards the targets for reducing injury, ill health and days lost at work
- HSC Strategy
- Sensible risk
- Cultural drivers including top level leadership
- HSC’s Enforcement policy
- Proposed changes to the governance and structure of HSC & HSE

### **State of health and safety in Great Britain & progress towards the targets for reducing injury, ill health and days lost at work**

I would like to briefly re-cap the Revitalising Health and Safety targets to be achieved by 2010 :

- To reduce incidence rate of fatal and major injury by 5%
- To reduce incidence of work related ill health by 10%
- To reduce working days lost by 30%

What do the 2005/6 health and safety statistics show in terms of progress towards Revitalising Health and Safety targets to be achieved by 2010 ?

- Fatalities fell from 236 in 2003/4; 220 in 2004/5 to 212 in 2005/6 – major injuries have also fallen - in 2005/6 major injuries stood at 118,645 down from 122,922 in 2004/5

- Ill health: a significant reduction in incidence rate of work related ill health has been achieved - 10% target probably met – with over 523,000 new cases occurring in 2005/6
- Days lost : a reduction in working days lost – 30% target reduction by 2010 probably on track
- 30m days lost in 2005/6 - 20m days lost due to msd & stress in 2005/6 (down from 25m days in 04/05).

At the time of the publication of the 2005/6 health and safety statistics in November 2006 I applauded the improvements that had been made across all three of our target areas – in reducing ill health, injury and days lost.

A quarter fewer days lost because of health and safety failures comparing 2005/6 with the start of this decade: from 40 million down to 30 million days lost per year. That is a success by any means.

I remember the scepticism about the targets and the views of many that they were too challenging. These figures prove the naysayers wrong.

Nevertheless we cannot and should not be complacent. We can not the safety improvements for granted, and there still are too many days lost because of ill health and far too many people leaving employment because they've been made ill never to work again. Moreover there are big challenges ahead, not least then surrounding casual work and migrant labour.

## **HSC Strategy**

Importantly the statistics show that HSC/E is fulfilling its mission to protect people at work. Our workforce is now healthier and safer and there are huge business benefits. These figures show the benefit of good regulation, sensibly applied.

But of course this progress isn't just down to the regulator, but to all parts of the health & safety system. We've worked hard to engage with stakeholders – including industry and professional associations, employers, trade unions and employees. I've been impressed by the effort that many have made.

Together we are implementing the Commission's strategy to make better use of communications, target our inspection effort to achieve greater impact, make better use of partnerships, and help people benefit from a sensible health and safety culture.

## **Sensible risk**

'Get a life and let others get on with theirs' was the message I gave at the launch of the sensible risk principles in August last year.

Health and safety is about recognising real risks and then tackling them. The principles, which are simple and common sense, set out what we believe risk management should be about – ones that we know IOSH support and are keen for their members to put into practice.

Let me re-cap what HSC considers sensible risk management is about :

- Ensuring that workers and the public are properly protected;
- Providing overall benefit to society by balancing benefits and risks, with a focus on reducing real risks – both those which arise more often and those with serious consequences;
- Enabling innovation and learning, not stifling them;
- Ensuring that those who create risks manage them responsibly and understand that failure to manage real risks responsibly is likely to lead to robust action; and
- Enabling individuals to understand that as well as the right to protection, they also have to exercise responsibility.

Sensible risk management is not about :

- Creating a totally risk free society;
- Generating useless paperwork mountains;
- Scaring people by exaggerating or publicising trivial risks;
- Stopping important recreational and learning activities for individuals where the risks are managed; and
- Reducing protection of people from risks that cause real harm and suffering.

We made clear at the launch of the principles that some of the ‘health and safety’ stories are just myths. But there are also some instances where health and safety is used as an excuse to justify unpopular decisions such as closing facilities. But behind many of the stories, there is at least a grain of truth – someone really has made a stupid decision. We’re determined to tackle all three.

But we must not lose sight of the many thousand workers seriously injured or made ill by work each year and the fact that with systems that ensure the effective control of risk these instances need not have happened and the countless pain, suffering and hardship could have been avoided.

Tackling those risks means applying a range of intervention techniques and the mix will vary from industry to industry. Let me reemphasise that enforcement is one of HSE's key intervention techniques, not the only one, but a vital one.

### **Cultural drivers including top level leadership**

Many organisations are striving to ensure not only regulatory compliance but also to develop their own health and safety best practices to aid organisational effectiveness.

Possibly the biggest challenge that we face is persuading our colleagues, whether at board or management level or on the shop floor, that their contribution is vital in helping to effectively control risks to health and safety.

Two key cultural drivers for health and safety improvement have been cited in recent research :

- A strong and growing conviction among organisations that accidents and injuries are unacceptable and
- A firm belief that business benefits through reduced costs, improved morale and increased productivity

Research has also identified essential “cultural” approaches :

- Clear management visibility and leadership -
- Ownership of health and safety by all employees
- Accountability at all levels within the organisation
- Open sharing of knowledge and information

These ‘approaches’ are the hallmark of well-run, high performing successful organisations.

HSE guidance on leadership in the major hazards industries deserves a wider audience. I will give you one example of advice on culture contained in this guidance,

“A manager’s role is not simply restricted to directing work and monitoring compliance with rules and regulations. Managers must act as leaders and facilitators: they must encourage suggestions, motivate their staff and engage with the workforce to solve health and safety problems.”

The prevailing culture in an organisation is heavily determined by the visible attitudes and behaviours, of directors and senior managers. It is important they make a real effort to send out the right messages to those 'below' them ensuring that messages do not suggest, albeit unintentionally, that safety can be ignored and corners cut if necessary.

A sound safety culture has its basis in the messages that come from the top of the organisation. Senior managers and the board of directors set the overall agenda and need to give a clear vision as to what is expected, preferably with objectives against which progress can be assessed. This top-level commitment must be demonstrated through their actions so that all managers and staff can see that health and safety is taken seriously.

## **HSC's Enforcement policy**

The Commission's enforcement policy statement (EPS), first published in 1995 and revised in 2002, is a public statement setting out the general principles and approach the Commission expects from all health and safety enforcing authorities.

The principles in the EPS are well established :

- Proportionality in applying the law
- Consistency of approach
- Targeting of enforcement action
- Transparency as to how the regulator operates
- Accountability for the regulators' actions

Clearly enforcement needs to be perceived to be fair in order to have a positive influence on duty holders whilst also maintaining trust.

A recently completed evaluation of the EPS concluded :

- Enforcement could prompt health and safety improvement
- Many factors influenced the impact of enforcement
- It was unclear how the amount of enforcement impacted on health and safety
- There was a strong appetite for a wide range of penalties such as restorative justice currently being explored by Macrory review of penalties

The Commission accepted that evaluation had shown a need for continued effort to improve communication about enforcement including, for example, communicating the reasons for formal enforcement action, especially prosecution, in order to better demonstrate proportionality and effectiveness to both duty holders and workers/victims. Publicising individual cases to sustain our efforts to motivate duty holders was also flagged up.

We are pausing for breath recognising that the outcomes of a number of inter-related regulatory work streams, including the Macrory review and the proposed new Compliance Code for Regulators , need to be taken account of when determining next steps.

### **Proposed changes to the governance and structure of HSC & HSE**

Consultation on the merger of the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive closed earlier this month. Responses are currently being analysed by colleagues in preparation for consideration by the Commission, Executive and Ministers in due course.

HSC/E believe that the merger will provide :

- A more accountable structure in line with current best practice and one that has the respect and confidence of stakeholders
- Better decision making and a clearer public and regulatory presence

- For the continued independence of the health and safety regulator – a key strength of the current arrangements
- A balanced structure, building on strengths of current arrangements, at arms length from Ministers – and one that protects inspectors from interference in enforcement decisions
- A merged unified authority with a membership that reflects the diverse society it serves drawn from a wide range of backgrounds ensuring broader public interest considerations are take into account.

I am confident that your our stakeholders will derive a real and lasting benefit from these governance changes.

## **Conclusion**

My closing remarks are brief. The flyer for today's seminar, part from imploring you not to 'Kill Bill', encourages colleagues to attend and share their experiences and good practices. I am sure there are countless examples of health and safety arrangements and initiatives that have been put in place across the university that have had a significant impact in reducing the incidence of ill health and injury. I urge you to share those experiences today not least to demonstrate that the risks you face are manageable and indeed are being well-managed.

I am pleased to be joined today by HSE Inspector Gavin Bull who covers the Cambridgeshire area. Sara assures me that time has been set aside for questions following her presentation. Gavin and I look forward to your questions and contributions.