

## **Bill Callaghan's presentation to London Metropolitan IOSH Branch**

Tuesday 9 January 2007

My thanks to you Trevor and your colleagues for inviting me to come and speak with you this evening and have the opportunity to hear your views. I welcome the opportunity to report on the progress that HSC/E and its partners have made, including importantly IOSH and its members, in taking forward the HSC strategy and towards the Revitalising Health and Safety targets for reducing ill-health, injury and days lost in the workplace.

It is also worth setting out some of the measures that HSC has put in place to support the Government's Health, Work and Well-Being Strategy.

I would also like to take the opportunity to say a few words on the efforts of HSC/E, IOSH and others to promote sensible risk and to put the various newspaper attacks on 'health and safety' zealots (that includes you and me) into perspective. I also want to explore with you in the question & answer session how we can work together more effectively recognising that our respective resources are finite and under considerable pressure.

Importantly I want to hear your views on issues you face in your work to ensure risks to health and safety are properly controlled or indeed on the way that HSC/E operates as regulator, policy maker and influencer.

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 ?

- Although no clear change in incidence rate of fatal and major injury – 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 - with over 523,000 new cases occurring in 2005/6
- Days lost : a reduction in working days lost – 20m days lost due to msd & stress in 2005/6 (down from 25m days in 04/05). 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.

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.

I paid tribute to the determination and commitment of staff across HSE, and those in local authorities and working for our stakeholders, to concentrate their efforts on those risks that matter.

But we need to recognise the new and continuing challenges – of that 30 million working days lost overall, 24 million due to work related ill-health and 6 million due to workplace injury. As the structure of the economy shifts from manufacturing to services, and the pace and pressures of modern life change, the type of ill health people experience at work changes.

It is common health problems such as stress and back pain which continue to be largely responsible for work related ill health cases and this is one of the challenges the Government and HSC's Health Work and Well-being Strategy is currently tackling.

I would like to say a few words reflecting on the launch of Revitalising Health and Safety in 2000. I remember the scepticism about the target and the views of many that they were too challenging.

The 2005/6 statistics prove the naysayers wrong. But more importantly they 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.

We have made considerable progress over the last three years in taking forward main themes of the HSC's Strategy, that is :

- making better use of communications;
- targeting our inspection to achieve greater impact;
- make better use of partnerships, and;
- Helping people benefit from a sensible health and safety culture

I will pick out one particular theme. HSE is working in partnership with Local Authorities to help deliver the Public Service Agreement by prioritising our interventions. We are testing different ways of working, such as introducing flexible warrants and working together to support publicity backed national campaigns that have a balance of interventions, such as the Backs and Height Aware campaigns I've already mentioned.

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.

HSC/E will be facing considerable resource constraints over the coming four years. There will be no additional resources for HSC/E coming out of the current spending review. This is the financial reality we face and it adds considerably to the importance of the second of those strategic aims set out

in HSC's Strategy for workplace health and safety to 2010 and beyond – that is our duty of maximising impact from finite resources – which will continue to be critical to our continuing success.

For example, three quarters of our LA partners have supported the 'Height Aware' campaign to reduce the incidence of falls injuries by targeted inspection, enforcement and educational activity.

Similarly, we have been working with LAs and a variety of stakeholders to address back pain. 2007 will see another major publicity campaigns for 'backs'. 'Backs initiatives in 2006 Southern Water's promotion of messages with its contractors and business partners; the launch of the 2006 campaign at Tesco stores regionally; and BAA's week-long health fair and agreement to a lifting aid strategy for the new Terminal 5 baggage halls at Heathrow.

Another illustration is our joint work with Local Authorities over the last two years to address the problems of sickness absence in Royal Mail - now showing results with significant reductions in days lost.

It is good news that the long-term reduction in the rate of fatal and major injuries in construction and many manufacturing industries has been maintained. These are industries that we have focused upon in the past, and earlier campaigns are still reaping dividends. In these sectors we are on track to meet all of our Revitalising Targets including major injuries.

Another area of concern is the growing waste and recycling sector – it has a related increase in the number of injuries to workers. These workers are four or five times more likely to have an injury than average. We have recently piloted a novel approach to get messages to refuse crew members directly – without relying on line management - about the hazards they face. Evaluation suggests this approach has achieved a real change in attitude – the first step towards improved risk control.

However we are now facing the challenge of the Olympics until 2012 and the recent crane incidents in London show that we cannot afford to be complacent on the safety front.

Moreover we face a rising trend of major injuries in the services sector which if it continues could put the achievement of our Revitalising target at risk.

So the good news in these statistics has to be counter balanced by the challenges we face; the outcome of the next Spending Review; achieving the most effective balance of interventions between paid publicity, inspection, stakeholder work and enforcement; the changing nature of workplace risks; and the time it takes for our interventions and partnership working to bear fruit.

We continue to search for and develop other new ways to establish and maintain an effective health and safety culture in a changing economy, to be ready to tackle new problems that may arise.

We have the challenge of an increasing number of migrant workers, although there is currently no evidence so far from the official figures to suggest that the rising numbers of non-English speaking workers or differences in behaviour for cultural reasons has had a detrimental effect on health and safety performance.

I would like to turn now to the “Health Work and Well-being; Caring for our future” strategy. HWWB is :

- is a groundbreaking partnership between the Dept of Health, the Dept for Work and Pensions and the Health and Safety Executive – helps bring our agendas closer
- is based on the premise that good work is good for you
- Work also encourages greater social inclusion, enabling us to meet people, build new relationships and bring communities together

What are the key themes of the HWWB Strategy :

- The overall aim of the strategy is to improve the health and well being of the working age population. Striking the right balance between prevention, treatment and rehabilitation will not be easy.
- Influencing people, changing cultures and behaviours will not happen overnight.
- Encouraging breadth of debate and interest in this work.
- Welcome support from the major stakeholders; employer groups, the trade unions and professional bodies, and;
- Our vision is to gain recognition of work as important and beneficial, and to remove institutional barriers to starting, returning to or remaining in work.

We know that good work is good for our health. There is strong evidence that being out of work is linked with various adverse health issues, including increased obesity and reduced activity, increased risk of heart disease and increased psychological distress.

And we now have the recently published report, “Is work good for your health and well-being?” by Gordon Waddell and A. Kim Burton, which evaluated the scientific evidence on the relationship between work, health and well-being.

This shows that good work is beneficial for health and well-being and that being in work can help people recover from both physical and mental health problems. Work is good for individuals and their families and by lifting people out of poverty, it also benefits communities by increasing prosperity while reducing health and wealth inequalities.

Given the impact on our productivity and competitiveness in an increasing global economy, as it should therefore come as no surprise that the Government has placed the health and well-being of working age people high on its agenda. Keeping people healthy and in employment is crucial if we are

to achieve more motivated, healthy workforces and more stable, economically viable communities.

The Health, Work and Well-being Strategy recognises that if we are to meet the challenges we face and help people with health conditions and disabilities to remain in or return to work, we need to pay more attention to the health and well-being of people of working age.

What are HSC/E doing ? Our main activities fall into 5 categories

- Tackling the key sectors. We have been tackling the key sectors where we are likely to have the biggest impact, using a 3-pronged approach: prevention; advice and guidance; and robust targeted enforcement.
- Innovation. We have also become more innovative. The 2 best examples of this are our Stress Management Standards and Workplace Health Connect, a free impartial service offering SMEs occupational health, safety and return to work advice.
- Targeting. We are also better at identifying our target groups. We have programmes in place specifically aimed for example at large organisations, SMEs and the public sector.
- Partnership. The Health, Work and Wellbeing strategy and Workplace Health Connect are good examples of us forging mutually beneficial partnerships with other government departments, business, trade unions and other key stakeholders, which help us achieve our own targets.
- Improving. We have been ensuring a sensible approach to risk management by improving our messages and simplifying the concept of risk assessment to make it relevant and available to all. Our communications have also improved significantly.

'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 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.

In conclusion I would like to stress the importance the HSC attaches to your work and thank you for the opportunity to hear your views on issues I have raised, or that you face in your work to ensure risks to health and safety are properly controlled or indeed on the way that HSC/E operates as regulator, policy maker and influencer.