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Health and Safety in the Workplace

APSE health and safety
seminar

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Scale of the problem

180 workers killed last year at work
...but how many killed by work?

- Cancers (including asbestos) – 15,000+
- Other lung conditions - 4,000
- Driving at work, 1,000
- Other s ??????



Scale of the problem 2

- 1.2 million people currently at work suffer from an illness caused by work.
- 538,000 people suffer from a work-related MSD
- 415,000 suffer from work-related stress



Challenges for 2010 and beyond

- Recession
- New industries and employment practices – green jobs, use of migrant labour etc.
- Resourcing of enforcers
- Occupational health agenda
- Importance of Worker involvement



Recession

- Mixed effect on injury and illness rates
- Less investment in safety but biggest cuts are in occ health
- Changes in structure of workplace – construction/refurbishment
- But less new workers
- Less long hours
- Previous recessions have seen a fall in injury rates.



Recession 2

- Biggest risk coming out of recession
- New workers being taken on
- Increase in new employers/industries
- Health and safety falls down agenda



Green Jobs and new Industries

- One area where sector growing is “green jobs”
- Recycling and waste disposal huge risks – both injuries and occ health
- “Green economy” – untested technologies
- Development of nanomaterials



Vulnerable Workers

- Position of some Migrant Workers a national scandal
- Lack of employment rights of many – including bogus self employed”
- Workers in many SMEs
- Need much more enforcement
- New employment rights
- Extension of Gangmasters LA to construction

Resources

- In theory HSE budget protected for this year and next two
- “Red line” for number of inspectors
- Likely demands for “across the board” cuts after election
- LA funding will be hit harder
- No protection for LA H&S enforcement



Occupational health

- MSDs/stress 70% of work-related sickness absence
- Also asthma, dermatitis, cancers etc.
- Have not seen the same decline as in injuries
- Not subject to same enforcement activities



Occupational health

- Not seen as an immediate problem by employers
- Cost usually met by the state
- Most employers ignorant of what to do
- Lack of access to rehabilitation
- Solutions not always simple (work organisation)



Occupational health

There are solutions

- Good practice in Royal Mail, BT etc.
- Stress management standards
- Government initiatives such as the helpline, regional co-ordinators etc.
- The rise of the good work agenda
- But – must be based on partnership and employee engagement

Employee engagement

- New buzz-word for employers
- What does it mean and does it work.
- For many it is simply providing training, information and encouraging suggestions
- Employees must be empowered if they are going to engage
- Need support advice and guidance separate from their employer



Trade union involvement:

- Helps reduce injuries at work
- Leads to reductions in the levels of ill-health caused by work
- Encourages greater reporting of injuries and near-misses
- Makes workers more confident
- Helps develop a more positive safety culture in the organisation



Evidence

- Employers who had trade union health and safety committees had half the injury rate of those employers who managed safety without unions or joint arrangements
- Where there is a union presence the workplace injury rate is 24% lower than where there is no union presence



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Involvement through unions is more effective

- Safety reps are trained
- They know the workplace
- Often see risks first
- They have outside support
- Greater legal powers



Conclusion

- Difficult challenges ahead
- Many of them will be financial
- Not all bad
- Recent fatalities/injuries figures
- H&S “brand” still strong”

