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Health and Safety

APSE H&S seminar

Hugh Robertson
TUC



Health and Safety Brand

- Unrelenting pressure from the media on “health and safety gone mad”.
- Most about public safety
- Most are myths or distortions.
- Undermine the effectiveness of our work, as practitioners, regulators and as workers representatives
- Politicians seem to believe the myths rather than the truths



Scale of the problem

- Health and Safety as big a problem today as ever.
- Over 20,000 people killed prematurely every year
- 1.9 million suffer a work-related health problem.
- All the evidence is that this can only be reduced by strong regulation supported by good regulation and guidance.



What is government doing about it?

- HSE budget cut by 35% over 3 years
- Four separate reviews.
- Cutting regulation (self-employed, RIDDOR etc.)
- Forced HSE and LAs to stop enforcing in most sectors.
- Believes that our problem is over-compliance, red-tape and over-zealous “jobsworths”.



Are we over regulated?

- Complex, unnecessary or impractical regulations are, at best useless.

However

- HSE simplification exercise – with support from unions and employers
- Less than half the number of regulations now that there were 35 years ago
- Average business spends 20 hours and just over £350 a year on risk assessment (BIS)

- Over half of businesses have not done a basic risk assessment
- However is “over-compliance” a major issue or even wrong?
- Should we be promoting simply compliance or best practice and continual improvement?



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What is Government doing to deal with the real problems?



Regulation

- No new regulation unless from Europe
- No “gold plating”
- “One in one out” – now “one in two out”
- “Sunset clauses”
- No new “burdens” on small businesses (less than 10 employees) for 3 years
- Review of all existing regulations, ACoPs and guidance.
- Change to RIDDOR regulations (twice)
- Lose of protection for self-employed
- Pushing alternatives to regulation (responsibility pledges).



Enforcement

- Inspections to be reduced further by the cuts.
- No proactive inspections of “low risk premises” – this will reduce proactive inspections by a third.
- Introduce a charge for all inspectors/HSE work from when “fault” is found
- Local authorities expected to follow this line and inspect less. (New National Code)
- “Low risk” is a myth based on a believe that only safety counts.



Myth of Low Risk

- Government believes that offices, shops and schools are low risk so do not need proactive inspection.
- Only looks at injuries and fatality figures and ignore other preventable issues
- Offices can have higher levels of MSDs
- Schools have much higher levels of stress
- Shops have higher levels of both MSDs and violence
- Also wants to reduce enforcement “burden” on SMEs and self employed.
- Most of the most dangerous industries are mainly SMEs or self employed – construction, agriculture, fisheries and recycling.



Importance of inspections

- ❑ Possibility of a visit is an important factor in ensuring compliance.
- ❑ If a visit can only happen after an injury it will be counter-productive. Most employers do not think it will happen to them.
- ❑ Will also lead to under-reporting
- ❑ TUC research shows that 61% of employers make improvements because of the possibility of a visit.
- ❑ Visits are not necessarily seen as negative by employers. Over 90% found HSE a "helpful" organisation
- ❑ When an enforcement notice is served 70% go beyond just the minimum required for compliance.
- ❑ Reliance on consultants will increase as inspection numbers go down and access to information folds.

Support and Guidance

- Close HSE Infoline
- No new publicity campaigns, and those planned have been stopped.
- Revise all guidance. Tried to remove anything not a legal requirement.
- Promoting “on-line” assessments



Occupational health

- Biggest problem is not safety but occupational disease.
- Stress and MSDs responsible for over 75% of work related sickness absence.
- Occupational cancer rates among the highest in Europe.



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Governments Occupational health agenda

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Consequences

- No new regulations on director's duties, temperature or safety representatives.
- Fall in enforcement will mean increase in deaths, injuries and illness.
- HSE stated "the expected 'lower level of enforcement' would mean 'a consequent decrease in health and safety standards throughout Great Britain, with ensuing costs to society.'"



Local Authorities as Employers

- Focus on good practice – not compliance.
- Take responsibility for the supply chain.
- Contract compliance in procurement.
- Involve your workforce. – makes a difference.



Conclusions.

- Health and safety is as relevant today as ever.
- Local Authorities as employers can be exemplars.
- Politicians simply look at the immediate deaths and disasters because the occ health problems are often not immediate.
- Government policy is, at best sticking their head in the sand and at worst, political posturing.
- The problem is going to get worse unless we continue to campaign for workplaces where people can come home as healthy as they arrive.

