

BHSEA Programme Meeting 11 January 2016**HSE ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT AND FUTURE PLANS**
Samantha Peace, HSE Director, Wales, Midlands and South West

This is Sam's third year of presenting the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE's) annual update.

Sam opened her presentation by recounting something that she had experienced recently.....Whilst out on site she witnessed (and with a colleague stopped) a worker painting gutters several metres up and outside the guardrail!! This reinforces the need (even today) to be ever vigilant...

In a look back Sam explained that in 2015 the HSE celebrated what it had achieved over the last 40 years in creating one of the best health and safety records in the world - with the help of many professionals within industry including BHSEA members. She then pointed out the challenge was how to maintain and improve on that record.

In December 2015 HSE launched a conversation on the new strategy for the whole health and safety system. The strategy covers six themes:

1. Acting Together,
2. Tackling Health,
3. Managing Risks Well,
4. Supporting Small Employers,
5. Keeping Pace with Change,
6. Sharing the Benefits.

1. Acting Together

Sam spoke about the need to promote even broader ownership of and commitment to health and safety in Great Britain. The role of the Regulator remains as a catalyst for change. We need to share ideas.

2. Tackling Health

The safety record over the last 40 years is a source of pride. Not so with health. In 2014/2015 1.2m people were affected by injury and new cases of occupational disease, costing the economy £14.7 billion, and this is growing. HSE now have the Workplace Health Expert Committee in place to provide independent, authoritative and impartial expertise on workplace health. This is chaired by Professor Sir Anthony Newman-Taylor.

A member asked whether there would in future be greater focus upon mental health in the workplace. Sam responded that a good starting point for everyone is to tackle diseases with a scientifically proven cause and where there are methods to prevent and control risks that can be enforced. She pointed out that mental health issues, while no less important, are more complex and might require a different approach – not necessarily, at least at first, based on enforcement. We need to work collectively to tackle this.

3. Managing Risks Well

Sam spoke about the work done to simplify risk assessment guidance, making it more accessible to small businesses and the need for all of us, professionals playing their part too, to encourage proportionate and sensible risk management. We face a continuing need to ensure we do not get side tracked onto the trivial or go over the top.

Sam also reminded members of the need to continue to challenge senior leaders in organisations to ask the right questions ‘what is our risk profile?’ and ‘what controls do we have and do they work?’ rather than seeking assurances that nothing can go wrong.

4. Supporting Small Employers

HSE has worked hard in recent years to reduce the quantity of law and guidance and make it easier for small and medium sized enterprises (SME’s) to understand what they need to do. Small firms are sometimes buried in bureaucratic paperwork, often for reasons other than real safety and health, which can absorb time that could be devoted to sensible risk management. There needs to be a balance; proper means, like the right conversation, to establish that the business is competent and controlling risk while allowing the business to take responsibility for the safety of their operation.

5. Keeping pace with change

We all need to be alert to emerging safety and health risks. Sam spoke about the work of some HSE specialists looking at robots and humans directly sharing workspace. We need to encourage this innovation and growth while managing those new risks effectively.

6. Share successes and promote benefits of world class system

In Sam’s view, we have reached a turning point. We have made great progress in dealing with ‘elf n safety’ myths and a better general understanding of the difference between life threatening diseases and injuries and trivia or those who hide behind health and safety for a variety of unrelated reasons.

The new strategy, following the six themes, will be launched early 2016. HSE’s priorities will not change. Construction remains a priority, together with several other areas and health (including mental health) will feature in a substantial way. There will be closer working with health specialists.

Sam encouraged everyone to visit the website www.hse.gov.uk/news/judith.../help-britain-work-well161215 and join the conversation “#HelpBritainWorkWell”.



Questions from Members

- **How do we get safety specialists to talk to the workers?**

It is important that the message from the boardroom is delivered all the way through the organisation and there is a general acceptance that health and safety is the responsibility of everyone and not just the health and safety specialists.

- **What do the statistics mean?**

A member explained that management often only respond to information presented in the form of statistics and charts/graphs and specialists end up at a desk preparing these instead of helping others manage risks. Sam explained that leaders should set out a clear vision and standard that everyone involved needs to achieve. The focus should be on asking the right questions, leading by example and involving workers in managing risk by ensuring they understand the standard to be achieved.

- **What is the purpose of RIDDOR reporting?**

The information reported is used to observe and analyse trends, by industry and region to determine priorities and to see where the HSE needs to intervene and investigate issues more closely

- **Rumours regarding Asbestos...**

Asbestos legislation is due for review. UK policy, which reflects the legal requirements, remains unchanged. We “leave it alone” - know where it is, manage the risk and follow the correct procedures if disturbing it for any reason. While there are those that are lobbying for a different approach, Sam was not aware of any decision to change the policy.

Plans to remove boards from electricity meters when installing smart meters at domestic premises could involve risks which need to be controlled. HSE is aware industry will need to have competent, trained staff to carry out the work.

- **Abuse of Regulations**

A member pointed out that it can be difficult to convince SMEs to do the right thing when they see others flouting the law. Sam’s advice was to report concerns to HSE so they can be followed up if necessary and help create a ‘level playing field’. Not all instances of non-compliance will result from flagrant abuse of the regulations; some will be due to ignorance. This led on to a discussion about situations where employees fail to follow instructions. Sam explained that HSE are quite prepared to, where employers have done all they should to properly manage risk, hold individual employees to account for their actions.

- **Simplification of Regulations**

Members suggested greater simplification is required. A suggestion was made to incorporate more pictorial examples on the HSE website to strengthen the messages and Sam accepted that pictures can be very effective. She also praised the Working Well Together groups, which have a great impact because industry is educating its peers, eg scaffolders are teaching scaffolders – very practical help.

- **Accreditation Schemes**

A Member commented on the proliferation of accreditation schemes and how difficult it can be to source contractors with the appropriate skills and experience. Also, companies often ask tendering contractors to be part of a number of schemes, although they clearly duplicate each other.

- **Workplace Health Issues**

A Member within the insurance industry noted that although health risks were being identified and people were falling ill, the insurance industry had yet to see the claims. He had also observed that employers were not paying sufficient attention to health surveillance and prevention. For example, audiometry equipment was not being used to assess noise risks. Workers directly affected were not being consulted about their health concerns arising from their work activities.

Sam confirmed that HSE remains firmly committed to raising the profile of health going forward.

George thanked Sam for her most interesting presentation.