

Partnership on Health And Safety in Scotland

HSC Paper Update on Agriculture Sector

Purpose of the Paper

To inform the partnership of the developing strategies for health and safety in the agriculture sector

Background

Latest estimates show that about 420,000 people in Great Britain (GB) work in agriculture, which includes farming, arboriculture, fish farming, and amenity use of the countryside, representing about 1.4% of the GB workforce. The 06/07 figures confirm that agriculture remains the sector with the second highest fatality rate, with 8.1 deaths per 100,000 workers (compared to the rates in waste and recycling at 15.1, and construction at 3.7).

Discussion Points

HSC agreed the following option:

Refine and develop the current strategy maintaining a major focus on communications through SHADs and working in partnership with stakeholders targeting major causes of accidents and ill-health, monitoring impact over time, and refining as evidence dictates. Within whatever resource is available, there could be:

- a sharper focus on segmenting the target groups for our interventions where we are more likely to make a difference e.g. large contractors vs self-employed; forestry vs family farms;
- a refreshed focus on the use of intermediaries and other stakeholders to help promote key messages, (although attempts to encourage intermediaries and industry stakeholders to be more proactive are worth pursuing, they are not always easy when HSE has not been able and in all likelihood will not be able to maintain resources devoted to this sector in view of the likely contracting total HSE resource in the next spending period.)
- localised marketing initiatives exploiting information on the impact of major injuries and fatalities.
- a review of the methodology for the delivery of communication tools like SHADs to improve their impact;
- a review of models of influence including supermarket supply chains etc and taking into consideration the changing nature of agriculture e.g. diversification of use of land;
- a continuation of a little proactive inspection (but this runs the risk that the industry perception that inspection is a threat will be lost over time);
- a continued strong focus on targeting migrant workers in the context of the Government's agenda for vulnerable workers (led by BERR), where intelligence suggests they are at risk. This would mean continuing to work

closely on joint working initiatives with enforcers like the GLA where there are useful synergies e.g. "Operation Fuchsia" in the South West has targeted daffodil and broccoli growers. (However, future work on vulnerable migrant workers needs to be delivered in the context that there are other key sectors that also employ high numbers of such workers e.g. in construction and hospitality.)

- a renewal in attempts to explore the scope for more strategic closer, high-level partnership working with DEFRA and other agencies/departments. However in doing so, there are questions as to the scope for shared vision, synergy, reciprocity and problems with statutory remits, which could limit such partnership;
- a continuation of the current work with the insurance industry

The HSC welcomed the paper and all members of the HSC who were present offered comments, which provides immediate feedback on the level of interest. The HSC were enthusiastic about them taking a closer interest in agriculture and giving stronger support by nominating one of them to act as a Champion. They made some key points:

- recognition that the task of reducing injuries and occupational ill-health in agriculture is huge and extremely difficult in targeting "difficult to reach groups";
- acceptance that we must continue with our efforts to tackle injuries and ill-health in this sector, despite the stubborn flat position of the statistics - "we cannot walk away."
- acknowledgement that despite huge HSE effort and resource working with partners over many years, there was no evidence of impact in the top level of statistics;
- agreement though, that the future direction should be a refinement and refreshment of the current strategy and a rejection of the options of either a significant decrease or increase in resource available.
- suggestions included refreshing and repeating certain interventions tried in the past but with up-to-date information; consideration of how further segmentation could help; learning from other countries and sectors to refresh interventions; re-engagement with a wider group of stakeholders, perhaps through a conference.

Action

Members are asked to consider how they can contribute to the above strategy.