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Stop that ***** Noise!

Bradford Area Occupational Health and Safety Forum have signed up to the European Week 2005 Campaign Charter showing local concern about the human and financial cost of noise at work and a commitment to contribute to a European-wide campaign aimed at noise risk reduction and prevention awareness. The Forum signed the Charter at a 'Stop that Noise' Seminar, which it hosted recently.

Hearing damage from exposure to loud noise at work is a significant and preventable problem. Noisy workplaces are still too often viewed as a necessary evil. As the effects of noise are not instantaneous, it is not considered a priority. The truth is that noise can have a devastating impact on our health,



affecting not only workers in steelworks or on construction sites, but also millions of people employed in the service sector – in education, entertainment and call centres. Nearly one in four employees in the EU are exposed to such high, persistent noise levels at work that they have to raise their voices to make themselves heard for at least half their time at work.

Carol Duerden Chair of Bradford Area Occupational Health and Safety Forum signed the Charter at the Health and Safety week Seminar held in Bradford in October.

The Seminar included workshops on: audiometric testing; how to risk assess noise in the workplace; the problem of excessive noise in the workplace and the forthcoming legislation designed to tackle it and noise hazard legislation and case law. See inside pages for more details.

Carol Duerden said "With a European directive on noise coming into force by February 2006 it is high time to take

more decisive measures to 'Stop that noise'. Health and Safety week provided a good opportunity to raise awareness of the new Control of Noise at Work Regulations."

Fringe workshops at the Health and Safety week seminar event also took place including: Slips and trips run by Geoff Twentyman from Environmental Health; Hand Arm Vibration by Graham Reay, Principal Officer, Occupational Health and Safety, Bradford Council; Consultation on the Securing Health Together in Bradford 2 - draft strategy for 2006-2010, run by Neville Roland, Policy and Strategy Consultant and Jane Howie BAOHSF Development Worker; breakfast meeting on Dermatitis - the Forum is working with Bradford Environmental Health, the Health and Safety Executive and the Health and Safety Laboratories and invited local hairdressers and printers to this workshop. There was also an inaugural meeting of a Violence and Work focus group and a meeting of the BASRA (Bradford Area Safety Reps Association).

Slips and Trips

A £15,000 fine just because someone slipped on a wet floor? That's a bit over the top, surely? That was an item raised in presentation by Geoff Twentyman on slips and trips prevention. However, as Geoff revealed there was little bit more to it than that.



Geoff, Environmental Health Manager (Health and Safety) at Bradford Council, started his presentation by explaining that slips and trips account for over a third of all major workplace injuries each year nationwide. Furthermore half the reported injuries to members of the public and workplace visitors are the result of slips and trips. That's an awful lot of unnecessary inconvenience and suffering. There is no wonder therefore that the reduction of slips and trips in workplaces is a national target for the Health and Safety Executive and local authorities.

But back to the £15,000 fine. What was that all about? Well, it was imposed on a fast food restaurant following an incident where an 18 year old worker slipped on a wet patch, and in trying to stop herself falling put her arm out – straight into the boiling contents of a deep fat fryer! Geoff then asked the question “Was the wet floor the only cause of the accident? Or were there other contributory factors?” The analysis of this case study revealed a number of important issues which may arise in many workplaces. These included -

- i) shortage of staff, and the person with supervision responsibilities diverted on to other work in another area –
- ii) leaving spillages to be dealt with later -
- iii) lack of responsibility for getting faulty equipment repaired promptly, in this case an ice-making machine was constantly dripping and had been for a number of days –
- iv) lack of communication between shift managers, no-one quite knew what was going on.

Geoff then outlined what action the company had since taken to reduce such circumstances to a minimum. This included giving priority to dealing with spillages (even when it meant customers may have to wait slightly longer), systems to deal with faulty equipment promptly, managers knowing their responsibilities and company procedures, and employees being given backing by the company to deal with prevention of slips as a priority.

For further guidance on slips and trips prevention have a look at the HSE's website <http://www.hse.gov.uk/watchyourstep/index.htm>

Violence and Aggression

This session was not a presentation. It was an opportunity for those attending to share some of their experiences and concerns in relation to acts of violence and aggression experienced in a wide variety of jobs. There was a wide spectrum of work activities – retail representatives, teachers and N.U.T reps, civil servants, trade union reps from Royal Mail and health and safety officers from the private and public sectors.

A valuable factor in several people's opinion was having good training in the diffusion of aggression and potentially violent circumstances. Being in control of such a situation is extremely important and knowing the techniques is essential. Those present who had attended a recent Forum presentation on violence and aggression cited good pointers that had been made to such things as body language and listening skills.

One of the public sector participants explained how staff are having to adapt to the removal of glass screens in interview areas. One school of thought argues that this assists in the reduction of aggression by clients, on the other hand it becomes much easier for a direct attack to be made on an employee. There are many design and procedural factors to be considered in such places.

Shop workers may face aggression every day, which can be dealt with to some extent by good training procedures. However, dealing with shoplifters and facing armed robbers are other matters altogether, and procedures for dealing with employees after such events (management support, stress counselling etc) should form part of the company's health and safety programme.

The Royal Mail reps gave examples of how some postal workers are often blamed and threatened with violence for circumstances beyond their control, such as the non-delivery of items, especially cheques.

At the end of the session a number of people agreed they would like to form a violence and aggression focus sub group (of the Forum) which would meet with a view to examining what positive steps could be taken locally on these subjects.

If you are interested in attending the group please email Paul Arandall on paulyorkie@aol.com or Jane Howie on Bradford.baohsf@virgin.net.

“Stop that Noise!”: New Rules on Noise in the Workplace

Jenny Lawson, Manager of the West Yorkshire Euro Info Centre, briefed delegates on the new rules coming into force in 2006 on noise in the workplace, a subject which also formed the theme of European Week for Health & Safety at Work. The legislation is based on a European Directive and introduces stricter limits on exposure to noise at work.

After the setting the scene with some facts and statistics on the impact of noise on health, Jenny went on to explain that there will be a new daily exposure level for workers of 87 decibels (dBa) from April next year. Obligations on employers include the carrying out of risk assessments, action to prevent or reduce exposure to noise and the provision of hearing protection where noise levels exceed 85dBa. Workers exposed to noise over this level will also have a right to hearing checks.

Jenny concluded her presentation by outlining some exemptions to the rules for certain industries and some sources of further information and advice including the Euro Info Centre itself (eic@bradford.gov.uk).



Update on European Health & Safety Rules

An overview by Jenny Lawson, Manager of the West Yorkshire Euro Info Centre, of European legislation designed to improve health and safety at work began with some statistics to demonstrate the extent of the problem: there was 1 workplace accident every 5 seconds in the EU in 2001.

Jenny went on to outline the action taken from the 1980s onwards to try to reduce occupational accidents and health problems, including measures to address general health & safety as well as specific groups of workers and industries. Recently adopted Directives include one to tackle exposure to vibration at work (implemented in the UK from July 2005), another seeking to reduce workplace noise (due to enter into

force in 2006) and a third on exposure to electromagnetic fields (due to be implemented by 2008).

Other legislative initiatives under discussion address exposure to optical radiation, the health & safety of temporary agency workers and revision of the Working Time Directive. Jenny's presentation concluded with a look at other areas which might be the subject of EU action in the future including tackling harassment and violence at work and workplace ergonomics. For further details of current and future legislation, please contact the EIC at eic@bradford.gov.uk or Tel: 01274 434262.

More Noise - and the law

Judith Gledhill spoke about the history of noise hazard legislation. Judith went on to speak about noise case law. Thompsons were involved in paving the way for successful claims with the ship riveting noise case in 1983. In 1972 a code of practice to limit noise to 90 db in workplaces was established – Judith said as a benchmark if you have to shout at work to make yourself heard it is too noisy.

Under the Noise at Work regulations 1989, the 1st action level reduced the noise level to 85 db and all employees working in this noise level had to be advised to wear ear protection and advised that the noise level is 85db.. The 2nd action level was set at 90 db. Employers have to provide hearing protection (so far as reasonably practicable) and make sure that it is used.

Under the common law an employer has a duty to provide a safe place of work and safe systems of work. That includes protecting workers from the harmful effects of noise.

The onus of proof is always on the Claimant. A Claimant has to prove that they have a noise induced hearing loss, that they were exposed to excessive levels of noise at the premises of the Defendant they are taking proceedings against and that they brought a claim within time (i.e normally three years from the date they first knew or suspected that their hearing loss was caused by noise).

As of the 6th of April 2006 the noise regulations are to change again with the 1st action level reducing to 80 decibels and the 2nd action level reducing to 85 decibels with mandatory training in use of ear protection, rest periods and regular audiometric testing.

Under common law the employer has a responsibility duty to look after employees. The onus of proof is on the defendant. The compensation is not very high with severe cases ranging from £16,000-£25,000 and the milder cases ranging from £4,000-£6,770. Judith said that the clients often make light of their problems.

Stay Safe Event Targets Youngsters

An action packed 'Stay Safe' campaign benefited more than 1200 youngsters from primary schools across Bradford and Keighley in October.

The annual event educated pupils in fire, road, water, bus and building site safety, as well as provide advice on how to stop bullying and what to do in an emergency.

The organisations involved were Keighley Worksafe Project, West Yorkshire Police, Fire and Rescue Service, Construction Industry Training Board, West Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service, Keighley and District Travel, First Bus, School Nurses, BT Volunteers, Neighbourhood Road Safety Initiative and Family Services Unit.

Keighley Worksafe's Dave Towers has helped to coordinate the event, he said: "This is a fantastic opportunity to involve children in activities that make them aware of the many safety issues affecting their lives. It's an extremely interactive programme with lots of demonstrations and scenarios, so there's no time for the children to get bored."



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NOTE a *free* Health, Safety and Welfare of Women at Work Seminar is taking place on Tues 6th Dec 2006. Contact BAOHSF to book a place. All Welcome.

Also - A seminar on 'Smoke-free Workplaces' is to take place on the 9th of March 2006.



Free Health & Safety Training



Are you interested in free Health & Safety training for your organisation?

The Workers' Health Advice Team are delivering the following training sessions free of charge throughout December '04 and January '05.

- * Smoke Free Workplaces
- * Stress Awareness

To register your interest for either of the training sessions or for information on session content, please contact Karan Brown on 01274 393949.

see the Forum website at www.baohsf.org.uk

To receive newsletters, seminar lists and keep in touch please complete this forum membership slip

Name _____

Organisation _____

Address _____

Post Code _____ E-mail _____

Tel. _____ Fax _____

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