

## *HSA Strategy in the Area of Occupational Health*

**Legislative Background;** The Authority operates within the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. The Act provides both the remit and scope for us to achieve progress in the area of occupational health. In addition to the 2005 Act, there is also the Chemicals Act 2008 which gives further effect to EU chemicals-related legislation such as REACH, Detergents Export/Import regulations.

Regulations which are relevant to the area of occupational health include those set out in the General Application Regulations 2006 on Manual Handling, Display Screen Equipment, Noise, Vibration, Sensitive Work Groups and so on. Other important regulations include the Biological Agents, Asbestos, Chemical Agents and Carcinogens regulations.

Our **vision** for the Authority in the area of occupational health is:

***That work will contribute positively to peoples' health in Ireland***

The **mission** of the Authority in achieving this vision will be;

<p><b><i>To protect workers' health from any existing and emerging work related hazards and to encourage workplace practices that promote good health</i></b></p>
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The **role** of the Authority will be:

- to reduce the risk of ill health to workers by a **preventative** approach. This means ensuring that employers identify existing and future risks and potential risks to health; implement actions to control these risks and continuously improve their health management systems.
- to undertake and support targeted **promotion** of health for employers and employees that focus on those issues which contribute to good workplace health.
- to gather, analyse and apply the best available data, both national and international, and to conduct and access appropriate research. We will use this **intelligence** to enable us focus on priority workplace health issues.

The means through which we will achieve our goals therefore will be a combination of **prevention** (which includes inspection) and targeted\*

**promotion** initiatives. The approach will be supported by the incremental build up of adequate data and research.

The challenge for the HSA will be to build employer competence in meeting their responsibilities and to engender enthusiasm among workers to derive benefits from work to their own health.

The HSA will not have a lead role in the rehabilitation of workers following absence from work due to illness or accident, but will partner appropriate initiatives that assist in this regard for those whose absence is attributed to work factors.

\* By "*targeted*" promotion we mean that which addresses areas for which there is an evidence based link with a workplace cause or contribution.

## Our **Goals**

Our goals for the future can be set out under the headings of;

- Intelligence
- Prevention
- Promotion

### **1. Intelligence**

- 1.1 The HSA will set up an appropriate mechanism to ensure that we can adequately track and review existing, new and emerging issues in the area of occupational health and well-being and that we adjust our programme and strategy as appropriate to take account of these. This will require the involvement of external professional expertise.
- 1.2 The HSA will resolve the shortcomings in the reporting system for occupational diseases and ill health so that the Irish system has defined a clear national accountability for the collection and collation of data and the reporting of diseases; that data sources are of a volume and quality to ensure maximum reliability and that the Authority has access to this data to inform our actions. In addition this data needs to meet the EU criteria to enable comparisons.

- 1.3 The HSA will promote research and ensure that we have better access to recent, reliable peer reviewed research on topical occupational health issues.
- 1.4 The HSA will put a structure in place which enables a continuous consultative and advisory process on the management of occupational health issues in Irish workplaces.

## **2. Prevention**

### **2.1 Information and Guidance**

- 2.1.1 The HSA will ensure that all employers are informed of and understand their responsibilities in the area of occupational health. In addition to the development of information and guidance materials, inspectors will give on site advice as appropriate during inspection visits.
- 2.1.2 The HSA will advise employers as to how to integrate occupational health management into their overall management system for health and safety.
- 2.1.3 The HSA will provide dedicated / specific support to small and micro businesses who need easily accessible tools to help them identify and assess risks and to put in place a control and monitoring system that suits their business size and type.
- 2.1.4 The HSA will assist Irish businesses to address those significant issues that need specialist support (e.g. mental health work related issues;). Where relevant and useful, the HSA will implement such measures in partnership with others.
- 2.1.5 The HSA will promote the setting of goals and targets by employers for the reduction of workplace ill health. This will include targeting specific hazards for prevention through a combination of information and guidance, including on site advice by inspectors.

### **2.2 Legislation Development**

The HSA will work to ensure that any future relevant regulations or legislative measures will be proportionate to the risk and practical in their application.

### **2.3 Competence**

The HSA will assist in developing stakeholder competence in the area of occupational health. This includes employers, inspectors, trainers and others engaged in its promotion, implementation and assessment. This will be achieved through a combination of

information and communication channels, website, downloadable publications, development workshops; training sessions; We will also work within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) with organisations such as FETAC to achieve accreditation of specific learned competence modules.

#### **2.4 Education**

The HSA will work to include occupational health in all efforts to mainstream health and safety in the curriculum at primary, secondary and third level education in Ireland.

#### **2.5 Enforcement**

Inspectors will increase the number of inspections and, where necessary, enforcement actions in the area of occupational health, targeting priorities as appropriate to the sector, priority topic and size of business.

### **3. Promotion**

- 3.1 The HSA will undertake sustained general awareness campaigns to highlight the positive interaction between health and work, the need for occupational health systems and the protection of workers from work related ill health. Where possible we will collaborate with others in such initiatives.
- 3.2 The HSA will develop programmes and initiatives to be used at workplaces which will promote good workplace health. Implementation of these measures should assist in the avoidance of work risk factors for which there is evidence of a link to ill health.
- 3.3 The HSA Education strategy will support occupational health by targeting workers and future workers (currently in education) to motivate and equip them to take responsibility for their own and their colleagues' health and to accept the benefits.

Strategic partnerships will be required to achieve the above goals. Goals will be developed into detailed action plans for each year of our strategy and so form the annual programme of work for the area.