

ORR occupational health programme update

for rail dutyholders

September 2011:

This quarterly brief aims to bring you up to date on progress with some of the activities in the ORR [Occupational Health programme 2010-14](#), to help inform discussions on health at routine liaison meetings with ORR inspectors. We have identified key messages for rail dutyholders, and would welcome feedback. This issue focuses on:

- **COSHH compliance, including over-reliance on proprietary assessment packages;**
- **HAVS; and**
- **ORR support for National Stress Awareness Day 2 November 2011**

1. COSHH compliance

ORR inspection work in 2010/11 on compliance with COSHH revealed a number of common weaknesses in dutyholders' arrangements for assessment and control of exposure to hazardous substances. These included over-reliance on use of proprietary COSHH assessment packages in assessing the risk; failure to ensure proper inspection and maintenance of controls, including RPE, particularly in trackside locations; and failures to fully consider and manage health risks where work is sub-contracted. Further inspection of health risk management in construction work on the mainline during this year will further test compliance with COSHH by NR and its contractors.

Key messages:

- **ORR expects dutyholders to demonstrate a clear understanding of what constitutes a suitable and sufficient assessment under COSHH. Where proprietary generic COSHH assessment packages are used, they should not be seen as delivering a full risk assessment, but rather than as one input to the assessment process. Do the 'generic' assessments reflect the actual working conditions on site?**
- **Are adequate arrangements in place for cleaning, inspection, and maintenance of controls, including LEV and RPE, particularly for temporary/mobile worksites? Are written records available and up-to-date?**
- **Rail dutyholders need to communicate clearly to their contractors their expectation, as the client, that health risks should be controlled in line with**

the COSHH hierarchy of control. Can they demonstrate arrangements, via their tender, contract, and site inspection procedures, to ensure that contractors fully understand the health risks and have put the required control measures in place?

2. Hand arm vibration syndrome (HAVS)

The first HSE prosecution for HAVS under the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005 was heard in January 2011. The case against Cheshire East Council was brought after a 56-year-old employee developed a severe form of HAVS. The worker joined Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council as a mechanic in 1984 and regularly used heavy-duty vibrating equipment, including pneumatic drills and hand-held grinders. Despite being diagnosed with HAVs in 2005, the council failed to take any significant action for nearly four years to stop the condition getting worse. This case is reported on our [website](#) together with examples of formal enforcement action on health taken by ORR in the past two years

ORR inspection of construction work on both the mainline and London Underground during 2011/12 includes management of HAVS risk. However exposure to risk of HAVS extends beyond track maintenance and renewals, and may include general building and structures maintenance, and vegetation clearance for example.

Some dutyholders have successfully trialled engineering solutions to reduce HAVS exposure, particularly in track renewals work. These have included elimination (by use of remotely operated breakers rather than manual breakers); selection of newer lower vibration tools; and control of residual risk by monitoring cumulative exposure times by use of continual monitoring systems such as HAVmeters, tool tags and swipe cards. Such continual monitoring systems can have a useful role in understanding exposure patterns and informing risk assessments, and also for sample/periodic monitoring to provide assurance of technical and organisational controls. However, their routine use should not be at the expense of more effective technical and organisational control measures, particularly elimination and substitution measures. Employers also need to recognise that restricting exposure to just below the Exposure Limit Value using such monitoring systems will not necessarily comply with the law and may still result in many workers developing HAVS – the legal requirement is to reduce exposures so far as is reasonably practicable.

A good practice case study for managing HAVS by Tubelines is now on our [website](#). If you know of examples of good practice on health management and control that might make a good case study please contact us (Ian Gooday 0207 282 3942).

Key messages:

- **Dutyholders are encouraged to look at the good practice HAVS case study on [ORR web site](#), noting the productivity gains from use of a remote breaker rather than manual breakers. Consider what lessons might be learnt and applied within your company. If you have further examples of good practice, particularly to show the economic benefits of good OH management, share these with us (Ian Gooday 0207 282 3942).**
- **Dutyholders should be aware that our planned work this year on key health risks will include HAVS, particularly in construction and infrastructure maintenance.**

- **ORR inspectors will be testing whether companies are aware of good practice in HAVs control, and are applying the hierarchy of control rather than relying on health surveillance. Have you investigated elimination of vibrating hand tools; explored substitution with lower vibration tools; and effective means of managing personal exposures? Can you demonstrate that your purchasing policies, contract specification, task worksheets, and supervisory arrangements support effective management of HAVS risk?**

3. ORR support for National Stress Awareness Day 2 November 2011

Many rail employers have systems in place to manage work related stress at the individual level, using personal resilience training, employee assistance schemes, buddying schemes for drivers, and counselling. However, companies also need to prevent work related stress at an organisational level, to take a proactive rather than reactive approach, by use of a step by step risk assessment process, such as the HSE Management Standards approach.

We recognise the key role that employees' representatives have in tackling work related stress. As a follow up to our focus on health at Workers' Memorial Day in April 2011, we are inviting company level trade union safety representatives to think about prevention of work related stress in their workplace, in support of National Stress Awareness Day (NSAD), which is on 2 November 2011. As a starting point, we are suggesting that safety representatives complete the online exercises on [HSE's website](#) to help better understand their role in applying the HSE management standards approach. Five short exercises take them through the signs and symptoms of stress and ask what they can do as workforce representatives to help reduce and prevent stress. Once they've completed the exercises, answers can be saved and printed in PDF form and used as basis for discussion at joint safety committee meetings with employers.

- **Dutyholders should note ORR's overall approach to improving stress management in rail, which is to promote wider adoption of an organisational, preventive approach to stress management, for example using the HSE management standards approach. ORR's web page on work related stress should be live by end October**
- **ORR will be emailing company level safety reps nominated by rail trade unions in the week or so before NSAD, suggesting that they complete the short online exercises on [HSE's website](#) to help better understand their role in tackling work related stress and also how an organisational approach to stress management works. Results can then help inform discussions at routine H & S committee meetings or similar.**