

ORR occupational health programme update for dutyholders

March 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.

1. ORR baseline paper on occupational health in railways

This paper summarises available intelligence on the extent of health risks in the rail industry and presents our view of how health is currently being managed. Subject to approval by ORR's Safety Regulation Committee (SRC) on 21 April, it will be available on ORR's website shortly afterwards along with an opportunity for dutyholders to have any comments they wish to make published alongside.

As part of the review we established some key baseline indicators on occupational health, informed by responses to a short survey which we sent direct to 93 rail dutyholders (excluding heritage sector) in December 2010. 56% of the companies we wrote to replied, showing a willingness to engage with us on health. Key points emerging from the baseline survey for financial year 2009/10 were:

- 3.5 million hours lost due to work related ill health – likely to be significant under estimate, as many companies were unable to provide a reliable figure
- Many companies are completely unsighted as to the extent and costs of work related sickness absence – almost half of the respondents reported zero work related sickness absence, or were unable to identify the work related element.
- Far fewer rail companies report publicly against quantitative targets on worker health, than do so for worker and/or passenger safety. We know that the best performing companies report publicly on health, as shown by independent research by [IPSOS MORI in 2010](#).

It is a positive outcome that Network Rail has agreed to report to ORR quarterly against key measures on employee health linked to exposures to asbestos, lead, noise, hand arm vibration syndrome (HAVS), musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), and stress. We will monitor trends in the NR data, and use it to inform our interventions on health.

Further information – ORR baseline paper, Sharon Mawhood 0207 282 3748; NR's health return, Chris O'Doherty 0207 282 93752

Key messages:

- **Publication of ORR's baseline paper (subject to SRC approval) will provide an opportunity for rail companies to compare themselves against our overall judgement of the level of maturity in the industry on managing ill health, and to benchmark themselves against the baseline indicators. We encourage all rail companies to do so.**
- **Dutyholders are encouraged to note the survey findings in the baseline paper and review whether their current arrangements for monitoring work related sickness absence and health related Employers Liability Claims are robust and reliable. What contribution does work related ill health absence make to your overall absence levels, and how can you reduce it? For those companies who report zero work related sickness absence, ORR may question the accuracy of your figures.**
- **We know that many rail companies do not currently report publicly on worker health but many are planning to do so. In moving towards 'excellence' ORR expects to see companies reporting publicly on worker health as well as safety as a demonstration of visible leadership.**

2. Making the case for doing more on occupational health

A key part of the health programme is to promote to industry the business benefits of good OH management. A number of good practice case studies have now been provided by industry OH advisers – our sincere thanks. Inspectors have also identified several case study examples, including assessing and controlling the risks posed by background radon; clearing material from a heritage boiler; and vibration in infrastructure maintenance. These are being developed and some have been published on ORR's [occupational health web-pages](#), with further ones to be added. We have also recently commissioned a consultant to gather additional costed case studies showing the economic, performance or other business benefits of managing health risks. Their work will conclude in October 2011. During 2011/12 the OH Programme team plans to work directly with HR and safety professionals in the rail industry, using the case study material, to promote the benefits of good OH management. **Further information** – Ian Gooday, 0207 282 3942

Key message:

- **Dutyholders are encouraged to review the good practice case study material on ORR's web site and are invited to offer further contributions of good practice, particularly to show the economic benefits of good OH management. ORR will actively promote good practice by dutyholders via our website. ORR recognises the importance of the HR function in OH management and will be seeking their involvement later in the year.**

3. Workers Memorial Day 2011

Workers Memorial Day: 28th April 2011 has a focus on health. An event involving approximately 250 safety reps will be held at Edgbaston Cricket Ground where current programme of presenters includes Anna Walker ORR, Bob Crow RMT, and Olivia Carlton from London Underground, and NR. We have written to dutyholders asking them to support this event by allowing their safety reps time to attend. **Further information** – Keith Atkinson 0207 282 2002

Key message:

- **ORR supports the role of safety reps in good OH management. Dutyholders are strongly encouraged to allow their safety reps to attend WMD 2011 and to actively seek their feedback.**
- **ORR expects dutyholders to have clear understanding of how safety reps are involved in identifying, assessing and monitoring health risks, and to explore what more they might reasonably do to contribute to improved occupational health management.**

4. Planned inspection work on health 2011/12

For 2011/12, inspection will focus on known high risk areas (HAVS, stress, noise) and areas of known poor compliance (COSHH, RIDDOR reporting). Planned work will cover selected mainline operations (mainly construction activities), TfL, and also the heritage sector. We are developing a stress strategy 2011-14 to ensure a co-ordinated approach to this difficult topic, with emphasis on changing the organisation rather than the individual, via use of HSE stress management standards and managers competence tools. We will be raising awareness within the industry and tapping into the insight already gained by some rail companies who have used the Stress Management Standards approach and encouraging them to buddy other companies keen to put them to use.

Key message:

- **ORR inspection and intervention on health will continue in 2010/11 with a focus on high risk areas such as stress and HAVS, and in areas where compliance is known to be poor eg COSHH, RIDDOR reporting on health.**
- **On stress, our focus will be away from post traumatic stress interventions at individual level, with more on promoting wider take up of organisational interventions, specifically the HSE's stress management standards approach. We would welcome opportunity to work with/learn from rail companies who have tried the HSE stress management approach, or who wish to do so, and invite them to contact us.**

5. 2011/12 OH programme workstreams - The 'Top 10' list of key activities under the occupational health programme for 2011/12 has yet to be finalised but the provisional list includes:

- Further developing and promoting case study material on economic benefits of good OH management;
- Work with HR community and safety professionals on good OH management – including what characterises exemplars in OH and promotion of the HSE Stress Standards organisational approach;
- Promotion of OH programme – externally (better sharing of information e.g. via Heritage Rail Association; influence industry via stakeholder organisations) and internally;
- Gathering and use of health data - disseminating key data from the 2010 baseline paper; further work with HSE on benchmarking; role of RSSB; review

of NR health data returns; activities that influence the way the industry manages contractors to require RIDDOR/health reports and competent health assistance

- Raise competence on health – internally for ORR inspectors, and externally - explore health training for industry managers.
- Deliver added value as regulator – promote improved consistency in enforcement on health; input on regulatory changes on health; work with industry including ROSCOS on proposed changes to asbestos exemptions;
- Strategic input and planning for 2011/12 and beyond – include PR13 incentives on health; Faculty Occupational Medicine accreditation standards for OH service providers
- Targeted inspection activities – see paragraph 4 above
- Further development of ORR web-pages and web-link on health
- Work with TU/employee reps to set out best practice in managing specific health risks

Further information – Claire Dickinson 0207 282 3742

Key message:

- **Dutyholders to be aware of breadth of activity ORR will be engaged in on health during the coming year. Expect to see targeted inspection activity, plus interventions aimed at raising awareness and securing wider industry involvement in health management.**