

Revitalising Health and Safety

The GMB Strategy and Action Plan

Britain's Health and Safety Performance 2001

Everyone should be able to go to work and not be harmed by such activity. Not only is this a moral obligation on employers it is also a legal requirement. It is true to say that Britain has an impressive record compared to some of our European neighbours. However, it has been recognised that over the last 10 or so years fatal and serious accident rates have remained at an unacceptably high level.

Every year in Britain around 400 people are killed at work, over one million people suffer a workplace injury and some two million people suffer from ill health, resulting in 25,000 people leaving work ¹.

To make matter worse, the latest Health and Safety Executive (HSE) statistics ² show a 34% increase in fatal injuries at work. In the construction industry alone 128 people were killed at work in the last year. In the Service Sector there was a rise from 44 deaths to 74 during 2000-2001.

These figures make clear that there is no cause for complacency, and further action by all stakeholders is necessary to tackle the £18 Billion bill that death and injury at work cost Britain each year. In addition to this are the human costs of accidents and ill health caused by work activity - the real costs.

Revitalising Health and Safety

The election of a Labour Government in 1997 heralded a new impetus on health and safety at work. They recognised that new thinking and more effort was needed from all concerned parties. This was in stark contrast to the previous administration who had insisted that health and safety law was a 'burden on business' and that employers should be left alone to manage health and safety how they saw fit.

The Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, launched Revitalising Health and Safety during 1999 in an attempt to tackle the continuing toll from death and ill health in Britain. The aim of Revitalising Health and Safety is to reflect the changing world of work and the need for a regulatory system to match. It also acknowledges that there are parts of British industry, such as construction and agriculture, which kill and maim far too many workers each year.

Revitalising Health and Safety sets out how the Government intend to tackle accidents and ill health at work. For the first time ever as part of the initiative the Government has set national targets for reducing death and injury at work. The targets are:

- To reduce the number of working days lost per 100,000 workers from work related injury and ill health by 30% by 2010
- To reduce the incidence rate of fatal and major injury accidents by 10% by 2010
- To reduce the incidence rate of cases of work related ill health by 20% by 2010
- To achieve half the improvement under each target by 2004.

The GMB Response

This paper sets out the GMB's Action Plan drawn up in response to Revitalising Health and Safety and the targets contained within it. We expect GMB Safety Representatives to respond positively to Revitalising Health and Safety and, with their employers, work to achieve cuts in deaths and injuries over and above the Governments targets.

This paper also highlights the positive role that trade unions can play in meeting the targets contained within Revitalising. The GMB believes that unless trade unions and particularly trade union Safety Representatives are fully consulted and involved at governmental, regional and workplace level the targets cannot be met.

The wealth of knowledge that trade unions and their Safety Representatives have - overwhelmingly working people with real life experience - must be tapped and their ideas put into practice to begin to reverse the toll of ill health and death at work.

'You're Safer in the GMB'

Trade unions and far-sighted employers know that only by working together - in partnership - can progress be made on tackling health and safety problems in the workplace.

The 1972 Robens Committee report brought trade unions into the national health and safety structure and the GMWU (the union that preceded the formation of the GMB) responded by urging employers to take advantage of the knowledge and expertise of working people in tackling hazards at work.

After all those who do the jobs are in the best position to identify the main hazards and the best way of avoiding them in their own work. The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 gave employers a formalised structure and method of consultation with which to do this.

With the introduction of these Regulations trade unions were able to formally appoint worker safety watchdogs - Safety Representatives - and joint Safety Committees could be formed to bring managers and workers together to jointly tackle health and safety problems.

Employers who work with trade unions have benefited hugely from this approach. Research carried out in 1995 showed that where trade union Safety Representatives are consulted and involved in health and safety matters then the accident rate is 50% lower than where employers alone make decisions about health and safety.

In other words by talking to and involving the workforce, through their union, an employer can reduce by at least half their accident and injury rate.

Union / non union	Injury Rate	Actual injuries in one year
Trade Union Recognised	5.3	58,300
No Trade Union Recognised	10.9	181,500

Source: Reilly, Paci and Hall; British Journal of Industrial Relations, 33:2, June 1995

The GMB Approach

The central health and safety objective of the GMB is:

'TO TAKE ACTION TO IMPROVE HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS FOR GMB MEMBERS'.

To encourage the prevention of occupational accidents and ill health, the GMB has developed a systematic approach to the reduction of risk. This approach is based on identifying workplace hazards and then eliminating or progressively reducing the risk of injury or ill health arising from the hazard.

The GMB also supports a priority order of effectiveness as part of the preventative approach. The order is as follows:

- Identify the hazard
- Eliminate the hazard
- Control the risk - at source or by isolation
- The provision of protective equipment

The GMB has developed this policy in a practical way to identify effective solutions for organisations that the union works with.

To help ensure that our approach is put into practice where it matters - in the workplace - the GMB's policy is to have a full time Health and Safety Officer in each of our 10 Regions. We also employ a team of health and safety specialists at our National Office. Their job is to support the workplace activity of our 25,000 Safety Representatives.

Key Elements

The key elements to our approach are:

Employee Involvement

The GMB believes that it is impossible to consistently improve health and safety performance without the input and involvement of the workforce. Independent research and a whole series of joint initiatives have proven that the most effective way to achieve this involvement is through trade union Safety Representatives.

Informed Safety Representatives

Each year the GMB trains, or re-trains, around 3000 Safety Representatives. GMB Safety Representatives are provided with a comprehensive range of health and safety training, information and organisational support.

Access and Influence

The GMB has access to a wide range of health and safety organisations. There are GMB Representatives on a wide range of Health and Safety Commission Industry Advisory Committee's (IAC's). The union also meets and works with the Occupational Health and Safety All Party Group at the House of Commons, and has regular dialogue with over 100 GMB backed MP's.

This access to expertise and key policy makers allows the views of the GMB and its Safety Representatives to be fed directly into the legislative process.

Europe

The GMB has worked directly on every European based health and safety directive that has been implemented in the UK since 1988. The GMB sits on a number of Europe wide health and safety committees, has an office in Brussels and has developed the most effective lobbying record on health and safety matters of any UK trade union.

Joint Training

The GMB has a unique approach to joint training courses in support of health and safety initiatives. The GMB has developed GMB Training Services, an independent training company, to deliver joint training initiatives. GTS training courses encourage solutions between managers and Safety Representatives to real problems that their organisation faces.

Similar joint training courses are also run at the GMB's National College in Manchester. The courses help to develop a positive health and safety culture and a preventative approach towards risk control.

The GMB will offer joint training courses to every employer who recognises the union and is serious about improving its health and safety performance.

Working Well Together

The GMB launched 'Working Well Together' in September 1999. The aim was to demonstrate that by working together the GMB and employers could reduce accidents and ill health. The GMB has worked with a number of organisations and achieved dramatic improvements. Some of the organisations that have worked with the GMB include:

- Nestles
- GKN Wheels
- Birds Eye Walls
- Transco
- Bairdwear
- SITA
- Millennium Organic Chemicals
- Cambridge City Council
- Air Products
- Islington Cleansing Services Limited

The GMB has produced a series of documents showing how by working together these companies have reduced their accident rate from between 40% to 300%.

GMB - Working Together to help Revitalise Health and Safety

The GMB has 5 key themes to our response to Revitalising Health and Safety:

1. We will increase our resources and support for our Safety Representatives to ensure that they can work more effectively with employers to improve health and safety standards.
2. The GMB will press HSE to promote the fact that proper consultation and involvement of Safety Representatives can bring real and lasting benefits for employers. Not only is consultation with Safety Representatives a legal duty for employers, true consultation - in other words involving and discussing health and safety issues with Safety Representatives before decisions are made - is the key to reducing accidents.
3. We will increase the amount of resources available to prevent occupational ill health in GMB organised workplaces.
4. We will lobby Government and the Health and Safety Commission/Executive to ensure that:
 - New laws are introduced that ensure that where criminal activity leads to death or serious injury of employees, then custodial sentences can be passed on appropriate directors or managers.
 - Existing health and safety laws are effectively enforced.

5. We will campaign to ensure that local authorities have sufficient resources to enforce the law and be encouraged to use their position to become exemplars of best practice.

As well as the new targets set out in Revitalising Health and Safety, there are also 10 strategy statements. These 10 points are to give new energy to, and set a new strategic direction for, action to improve health and safety performance in the UK.

The 10 Point Strategy Statement

1. The health and safety system must promote better working environments characterised by motivated workers and competent managers.

i. The GMB will continue to promote and campaign for the best possible work environment characterised by motivated workers and competent managers. We believe that in the area of health and safety this can only be achieved by a workforce that is involved and consulted in the decision making process.

ii. To that end the GMB will campaign for new and better rights for worker representatives. This could include:

- Provisional Improvement Notices (Giving Safety Representatives the right to stop unsafe jobs or work practices. An Inspector would then judge if it was safe to resume work).
- Worker Safety Advisors (the creation of a system of Roving Reps who can visit sites giving safety advice and ensuring best practice standards).
- Better protection for whistle blowers.
- To ensure that the HSE have the tools to enforce better standards, the GMB will continue to campaign for increased resources for the HSE, and for more Inspector time to be devoted to proactive inspection activity.

iii. The GMB will continue to press for adequate fines and penalties for negligent employers. This should include unlimited fines and imprisonment for those who flagrantly breach the law and whose actions expose workers to the risk of death and serious illness and injury.

2. The Government will promote the contribution of a workforce that is 'happy, healthy and here' to productivity and competitiveness.

i. The GMB supports the HSE's 'Good Health is Good Business' Campaign. The GMB will incorporate the aims of the campaign into each of our training courses.

ii. The GMB, Government and progressive employers know that trade union organised workplaces are 50%

safer than those where managers alone make decisions about health and safety. The GMB will aim to take this message into every workplace possible. We will offer the benefits of our knowledge and experience to any employer who works with us.

iii. The GMB will train a new generation of Safety Representatives that understands their responsibilities and that of their employer. All GMB Safety Representatives will understand the benefit of continuous improvement in health and safety performance.

3. Occupational Health is to be made a top priority through the promotion of the Government's new occupational health strategy.

i. The GMB has already published its response to the Government's occupational health strategy. 'Enhancing Life not Endangering Health - GMB Occupational Health Strategy' sets out the GMB's approach for the next 10 years.

ii. As part of our strategy we will follow and adopt the 5 strategic themes set out in 'Securing Health Together'.

iii. The GMB's key aims are the prevention of work related ill health, the promotion at every opportunity of the physical, mental and social well being of workers and better work opportunities for those who have work conditions, who are impaired or are who disabled.

iv. The GMB agenda for occupational health is that:

- Occupational Health Services should be independent of employers
- The Government should take responsibility for funding occupational provision for example, through Occupational Health Projects.
- HSE need to effectively enforce occupational health issues.
- HSE must bring about legislation on core issues such as stress. This will be of benefit to employers and employees trying to deal with the issue. HSE's current position is untenable.
- More opportunities should be made available to get workers back into the labour market through better rehabilitation programmes.
- A change in everyone's attitude - Government, employers, GP's, workers and the public - towards occupational health.

4. Small to Medium Enterprises (SME's) will be targeted with the message that they can reap rewards from effective safety management.

i. The GMB will continue work that is under way with SME's in the chemicals and plastics sectors.

ii. The GMB will offer to work with any SME that wants to improve its safety performance. The GMB will train and provide backing to their employee Representatives, and will give advice on health and safety issues to employers.

iii. The GMB will make available its Best Practice Guide - giving practical advice on solving health and safety problems - to employers who we are working with in the sector.

iv. The GMB will work with organisations, such as the Federation of Small Business, to promote the message that SME's are not a homogeneous group. They are found in every sector of the UK economy and therefore need industry specific rather than generic health and safety advice.

v. The GMB will campaign for innovative and targeted materials aimed at capturing the 'hearts and minds' of SME's.

vi. The GMB will campaign to change the Fairness at Work laws. At present, companies with fewer than 20 employees are denied union recognition procedures. This deprives employees in those SME's of the most effective consultation method available.

5. New system of compensation, benefits and insurance systems will be developed to motivate employers to do better.

i. The GMB will be exploring ways of how to better use and, where necessary, expand the role of the Insurance industry in motivating employers.

ii. The obvious role will be increased premiums for employers who do not adequately manage health and safety. However the GMB will look for ways of involving the insurance industry in proactive work and to examine how it might be a lever for improvement in partnership with employers.

iii. The GMB has already begun discussions with ethical Insurance companies and we will publish a set of proposals for expanding this role in the near future. Our aim is to engage with the industry to find common ground to motivate employers and to ensure the industry develops a constructive dialogue with GMB Safety Representatives.

6. A more deeply ingrained culture of self-regulation by employers needs to be cultivated.

i. The GMB will work to foster this approach, but believes that to make this effective requires underlying statutory direction. To revitalise that process we need to take note of new forms of hazards, build on new and existing forms of organisation and learn from new initiatives.

ii. In promoting self-regulation, the GMB makes it clear that all organisations covered by enforcing authorities remain under their inspection regime. Self-regulation has to be underpinned by effective enforcement.

7. Partnership on health and safety issues must lead the way. This should include all stakeholders at all levels.

i. The GMB has launched Working Well Together to demonstrate that by working together, unions and employers can achieve drastic reductions in accident rates.

ii. Some examples of the track record of Working Well Together include:

- Nestles, York - Slips, trips and falls reduced by 60% over years. A 40% cut in manual handling injuries.
- GKN Wheels - Joint work to change the health and safety culture has led to a 300% improvement in the company accident rate.
- Birds Eye Walls - Working together on an employee involvement programme led to an 86% reduction in accidents.
- Transco - A joint risk assessment programme cut accidents by 50% in the first year in Transco's Northern Region.
- SITA - GMB and SITA have received £50,000 government grant to develop a manual handling training programme to reduce manual handling injuries in the waste management sector.
- Bairdwear - Worked together to develop a need guard that has eliminated needle in finger injuries. In other words a 100% reduction in needle in finger accidents.

iii. The GMB will be campaigning for this model to be adopted by government and for further funding to continue to develop the most effective partnership model available - employers, trade unions and employees working together.

8. Government must lead by example, and should demonstrate best practice standards on health and safety.

i. The GMB believes that Local Authorities should be required to allocate a specific part of their budget to promote healthy and safe work practices.

ii. The GMB will campaign for government to prescribe the health and safety and ethical requirements necessary in both government procurement and local authority contracts. Good health and safety practice should inform every aspect of local authorities business under Best Value.

iii. The GMB will be working with local authorities to encourage them to fully participate with European Health and Safety Week. We will write to a targeted number of local authorities asking them to jointly sign up to an action plan for long term health and safety promotion.

iv. The GMB will be working with our activists in local and central government to ensure that the Revitalising agenda is on the agenda of Safety Committees, and that government does become an exemplar of best practice.

9. There should be education, starting in primary school, in health and safety skills and risk management.

i. The GMB will respond positively to any training college, or any further or higher education centre who want trade union input into their course content. A particular focus will be management courses, those studying for trades with a high accident rate, and medically based courses.

ii. The GMB already has links and supplies speakers for a wide range of educational establishments, such as IOSH, Birmingham University, a number of schools and colleges in the South East and North West. This will be expanded.

iii. The GMB Young Members Group and our 'Massive' youth organisation will take the Revitalising message into as many areas as possible using specially designed packs for students, and our Young Workers Health and Safety Guide.

iv. These groups within GMB will work to counter the image of health and safety as 'boring' and something that stops people from enjoying themselves.

10. Health and safety should be 'designed in' to every process and product, especially where there is a heavy reliance on contracting.

i. The GMB strongly supports this approach and believes as a first step Government must spell out to all stakeholders - employers, employees, contractors, sub-contractors etc - what their role is managing health and safety.

ii. The GMB will be campaigning for an amendment to the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act to make it absolutely clear what each link in the stakeholding chain duties are in relation to health and safety.

Future Work

In January of each year the GMB will produce a report on how we are contributing to the aims of Revitalising Health and Safety. We will update our actions regularly and promote action in other relevant organisations we deal with. Our overriding aim is continuous improvement in all aspects of health and safety at work.

Notes

1. Figures taken from the Government paper 'Revitalising Health and Safety' Consultation Document. Published by Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (0870 1226 236)
2. HSE Annual Report and Statistics 2001-2001. Provisional Figures.

Copies of Revitalising Health and Safety are available from:

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