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Kate Sweeney
Chief Statistician
Health and Safety Executive
Redgrave Court
Merton Road
Bootle
Merseyside
L20 7HS

Email Kate.Sweeney@hse.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Ms Sweeney

Introduction

This response is submitted by Unite the Union. Unite is the UK's largest trade union with almost 1.5 million members working in the private and public sectors. The union's members work in a wide range of industries including agriculture, forestry, horticulture, docks, construction, manufacturing, food manufacturing, distribution and retail, financial services, road, rail, air and sea transport, print, media, not for profit sectors (including youth and community workers), local government, private contractors providing public services, education and the health service.

General comments

Unite is strongly condemns any cuts to the public services including to the HSE and government statistical work. Unite believes that a consequence of cuts to public services involving health and safety enforcement and related activity is likely to be a rise in deaths and injuries at work.

Accordingly Unite is strongly opposed to any reduction in current arrangements for the collection and publication of health and safety statistics; indeed we believe that much more can be done to highlight occupational safety and health statistics.

More data is needed

For example, much more (body) site specific information needs to be collected on mesothelioma particularly as asbestos exposure is now being linked to cancers in the larynx, ovaries and other areas.

We also believe that not enough attention is given to collecting information on gender-specific issues such reproductive ill-health data related to occupation.

Unite also believes that data on work-related road traffic accidents should be collected as a matter of course as at present there are no accurate statistics available, and many people drive for their work for various reasons, in addition to those who drive professionally, or in the course of their occupation (for example agriculture and forestry workers).

We also believe that systems should be set in place to collect statistics directly from hospitals at the point when they first treat victims of workplace accidents.

We strongly support extending HSE's data collection to complement the existing information, for example on levels of exposure to certain hazards.

We would be happy to engage in discussions with HSE to take this forward.

Unite uses all the current sources of statistical data

For example in our published health and safety guidance and information, in speeches and press releases, as part of our education and training for our members, and in parliamentary activity.

We may use information in a variety of ways, bearing in mind the very wide industrial base of our members. For example we use and highlight data relating to a particular sector, such as the food sector, and the very dangerous sectors such as the agriculture sector or the construction sector; or use data about particular occupational diseases such as cancer, asbestos related illnesses or farmer's lung, or seek data because we are considering equalities issues such as gender, age and disability.

We always find that HSE statistics section provides an excellent and prompt service.

Examples of how Unite and its members use HSE's statistics

A long serving Unite safety representative working at a college

I have noticed the effect on management of having to report incidents under RIDDOR. RIDDOR [reporting] also alerts HSE to potential problem areas, and aids the reps tremendously.

Unite member working in logistics

Although I have not used the statistics directly I believe that they are a valuable tool in monitoring on going problems within the wider workforce. An example being the deaths related to scissor lifts (SL); although we do not have our own SLs they are constantly used within the warehouse by contractors, and being aware of the type and model of the SL enables us to scrutinise the equipment.

Member working Docks and Waterways Sector

We would use statistics as one of the ways of monitoring our health and safety policies.

Unite tutor who conducts safety representatives' training

I always get the students to look at the various HSE statistics just to highlight the number of accidents, deaths etc.

Unite research department: HSE statistics used in Unite health and safety campaigns

Civil aviation: we used the HSE studies and statistics relating to musculoskeletal injury risk at airports when campaigning for a reduction in bag weights.

Rail: we have highlighted the lack of proper enforcement of RIDDOR by Network Rail which has caused Unite to become more widely recognised as a rail union in the public eye.

Underground: we have used the statistics on the underground to call for improvements in safety.

Employers

In addition, our members report that their employers put the official statistics HSE collects to a variety of uses including for corporate and local monitoring purposes (eg RIDDOR statistics, HSE enforcement data, Mesothelioma and asbestos statistics); for training (eg Mesothelioma and asbestosis statistics); and for use by occupational health services (eg data on occupational diseases from a variety of sources, self reported data, respiratory conditions, occupational skin disease).

We have received reports of concerns raised by trade associations, for example in the ceramics sector, who collect statistics from their members and are concerned that if any changes are made to official statistics collection then their own figures will be thrown out of kilter.

Cutting back on data collection would impact significantly on these activities which are used by employers (as they should be) to aid prevention.

Conclusion

The existence, publication and dissemination of this data is absolutely vital in the fight to prevent accidents and ill health. Highlighting hazards and ill health trends is absolutely essential to help prevention.

As we have said we believe that HSE statistics service does an excellent job and if the service is reduced in any way the result is likely to be the underplaying of deaths and injuries at work. We urge you not to cut this service in any way. The unintended consequences of cuts such as this are likely to be more deaths and injuries at work.

We thank you for providing us with the opportunity to comment and look forward to hearing from you with your confirmation that no cuts will be made to your services.

Yours sincerely

General Secretary

Unite contact: Susan Murray 0207 611 2596