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FEBRUARY 2008 Update

Government proposals to cut health and safety 'red tape'

A major review of safety laws has been announced by Chancellor of the Exchequer, Alistair Darling. Speaking at a recent CBI Conference, Mr Darling said a review will be carried out by the Better Regulation Executive (part of the Department for Business and Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR)) to assess how government can make the law easier for employers at small companies.

While the announcement has been welcomed by small firms, Nick Palin of the Forum for Private Business (FPB) wants the exercise to reduce legislative burden "rather than just helping them wade through the raft of legislation." Referring to an FPB survey last March which found that small businesses devote an average 14 hours each month on health and safety matters, Mr Palin is hoping that any new regulations will have "a clause allowing it to be repealed if found unworkable."

In the meantime the BERR will obtain the view point of stakeholders, either directly or from a series of events run across the UK. More information on the review can be found at:
http://bre.berr.gov.uk/regulation/reform/health_safety/index.asp

EXAMPLE NEWSLETTER

Shattered lives: HSE's slips, trips and falls from height campaign 2008

The HSE will be running a new campaign in February and March 2008 on slips, trips and falls in the workplace. The aim of the campaign (*Slips, trips and falls at work shatter lives*) is to raise awareness of the risks and help those involved to take simple action that will prevent slips trips and falls.

According to the HSE, more than 1,000 workers each month suffer a serious injury following a slip, trip or fall. The campaign is aimed primarily at those most at risk of a slip, trip or fall at work and those best placed to take action - construction workers, electricians, gas fitters other tradespeople, and site managers, kitchen managers and chefs, food retail staff, area and store managers, food operatives and their shift managers. However slips, trips and falls accidents can happen in any workplace and the HSE urges anyone working where there is a risk to get involved in the campaign. To find out how, sign up for the free regular update at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/ebulletin/index/htm>

In Parliament:

Temporary and Agency Workers (Equal Treatment) Bill: A Bill to provide for the protection of temporary and agency workers; to require the principle of equal treatment to be applied to temporary and agency workers; to make provision about the enforcement of rights of temporary and agency workers; and for connected purposes. First reading 5 December 2007 - ordered to be read a Second time in the House of Commons on Friday 22 February.

Health and Safety (Offences) Bill 2007-08: A Bill to revise the mode of trial and maximum penalties application to certain offences relating to health and safety. Second reading due Friday 1 February (House of Commons).

A meeting in the House of Commons on Monday 25 February has been arranged during which Lord McKenzie will speak to a cross-party audience of MP's and members of the House of Lords to discuss calls for health and safety to be made a regulated profession. The assembly will be chaired by Michael Clapham MP, the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Occupational Health and Safety.

There are currently no Acts awaiting Royal Assent.

Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005: changes due to commence on 6 April 2008

These regulations generally came into force in 2006 to implement the Physical Agents (Noise) Directive (2003/10/EC) which tightened the legal requirements in relation to noise by lowering the exposure action values. Changes will apply to exposure to noise at work in the music and entertainment sectors from 6 April 2008 and practical guidelines, developed by industry and HSE, will be available by this date.

Ladder Exchange: 4194 dodgy ladders taken out of use

The HSE claims its 2007 campaign aimed at taking 4000 substandard ladders out of the workplace has been a huge success. Working since June with its partners in local authorities, SGB Hire and Sale, Speedy Hire and HSS Hire, by the end of last year **4,194 dodgy ladders** had been taken out of Britain's workplaces in the *Ladder Exchange* scheme. HSE also thanked other organisations who supported the campaign, including the Ladder Association, ladderstore.com and Wickes.

However, HSE says there are still a lot of "dodgy" ladders in use, and therefore plans to run a **new Ladder Exchange initiative in Autumn 2008**. The HSE will again be working with partners to give those using substandard ladders the opportunity to exchange them before HSE inspectors or those from local authorities call. If you want to be involved in the new *Ladder Exchange* go to www.hse.gov.uk/falls/ladderexchange for more information.

In brief: EXAMPLE NEWSLETTER

Stress at work a killer: Research at University College London has pinpointed stress at work as being a direct cause of heart disease. Results of the study show employees suffering chronic stress are 68 per cent more likely to fall victim of Britain's biggest killer. According to researchers, anxiety was found to damage the way the heart dealt with tense situations. The study, which has been underway since 1985, also found the under-50's most at risk. Commenting on the results, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "This provides further evidence that stress is not just a major cause of mental health problems but is also often behind serious, and sometimes fatal, physical diseases."

National Men's Health Week 2008: The HSE will be supporting National Men's Health Week 2008 (9-15 June), organised by Men's Health Forum to provide an independent and authoritative voice for male health and to tackle the issues affecting the health and well-being of boys and men in England and Wales. In support of this year's theme, the HSE shall be focusing on men's health in the workplace. The aim will be to improve the health of men by encouraging them to take advantage of occupational health initiatives available in their workplaces and to help employers strengthen and expand such initiatives. The HSE says this will result in boosts to workplace morale and a decrease in sickness absence, both of which are invaluable to employers and employees alike. For more details go to: www.menshealthforum.org.uk

Research by software developer Wellnomics shows UK workers spend more time at their computers than their European, North American and Australasian colleagues - 3.36 hours each day, or 16.8 hours per week. The global survey shows workers from the US are second (14.5 hours p/w) and Australia third (13.6 hours p/w). The study also shows that e-mail took up the largest amount of UK workers' computer time, at 28 per cent.

Link between work and asthma: Research is currently underway to investigate the link between asthma and different occupations. With an estimated 25 per cent of individuals exposed to certain workplace substances who will develop the ailment, Asthma UK, which is funding the research, hopes to confirm associations as well as identify other occupations not previously linked with asthma, and highlight the scale of the problem. For more information on asthma: visit www.asthma.org.uk/adviceline or call Asthma UK Adviceline on 08457 01 02 03

New lightning protection standards: To promote a consistent approach within the construction industry, new lightning standard BS EN 62305 (Parts 1-4) has been developed to provide general principles to be followed in protecting against lightning strikes of structures, their installations and staff, and services connected to them. BS EN 62305 replaces the old, single standard BS6651. A guide to the application of the standard can be obtained from BSI British Standards at www.bsi-global.com

Workplace bullying rife: One in four employees suffers from stress caused by bullying at work, according to a Samaritans survey. Their research shows younger workers are most vulnerable to stress and feel unable to discuss with their boss or another colleague about being bullied. A survey of 2600 adults found more than half had seen a colleague cry because of pressure, while a third felt their employer turned a blind eye to the issue.

Working long hours on the rise again: The number of people working more than 48 hours is increasing after a ten-year decline. More than one in eight employees now works more than 48 hours a week despite protection from the Working Time Regulations, according to a TUC analysis of the recently published Labour Force Survey. People working in London and the South East are most affected. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said employers get away with it because local authorities and the HSE don't have the resources to implement the law. More information can be found at: www.tuc.org.uk/work_life/tuc-14014-f0.cfm

Biological risks in the workplace: A new report from the European Risk Observatory has identified the top emerging biological risks that are most likely to affect workers in the EU. Occupational risks related to global epidemics, including avian flu, Ebola, cholera and yellow fever, are the highest ranked threat according to the report, closely followed by workers' exposure to drug-resistant micro-organisms and a lack of information on biological risks. Workers such as farmers, health-care professionals and those in the waste treatment industry are those deemed most at risk. More information can be found at the European Risk Observatory website: www.riskobservatory.osha.europa.eu

Four new research projects are to be funded by IOSH to "explore the challenges of delivering safe and healthy work." The individual projects will look at the effects of work-related violence; the impact of occupational demands on call-centre workers; the role of supply chains in influencing health and safety; and the relationship between work and well-being.

EXAMPLE NEWSLETTER

HSE to promote staff health to boost productivity and lower absenteeism: Business Link East Midlands has produced ten top tips to show you how your business can maintain a healthy workforce during 2008 and beyond. The tips include information about assessing the risks, optimising working conditions, promoting a healthy work-life balance and explains how to deal with employees should they become ill. Contact a Business Link advisor on 0845 058 6644 or visit www.businesslink.gov.uk

Free guidance for RPE filter change: Diversified health care company 3M has produced a range of self-help products to enable employers to decide when reusable respirators should be replaced. This results from 3M research suggesting worker health and safety could be at risk by not regularly changing RPE. Findings show that in over half the cases it was the employee who decided when to change the respirator, with 76% deciding when to replace it, rather than robust policy and procedure requirements. A filter selector wheel, flowchart posters, record cards, tick sheets and online filter selector are **available free** to companies registering at the 3M website www.3m.co.uk/filtersupport

Maintenance changes for automatic fire detection systems: A reminder that from 31 March 2008, all new automatic fire detection systems will need to be designed, installed and maintained by third-party certified companies with BS 5831 part1 in their remit.

(Sources: Health and Safety Executive (HSE); Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH); The Safety & Health Practitioner January and February 2008 editions; www.thisisleicestershire.co.uk; Northcliffe newspaper publications; Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI))

Let MNBS help you deal with your concerns. Simply contact us to arrange a free, no-obligation, consultation in the strictest confidence to discuss ALL your health and safety requirements.