REPORT OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY ADVISORY CONFERENCE 2010

Held in Doncaster on Wednesday 24th February 2010
Opening Address

Senior Assistant General Secretary - Mick Cash

Opens 7th Annual Conference and first item is to elect the Liaison Committee for the Conference and Chair for the Committee and this Conference.

Elected to Liaison Committee were:

Jim Philp, Greg Hewitt and Tony Birch

Elected as Conference Chair:

Greg Hewitt.

Mick introduced the theme of the conference which this year is “Fatigue” and said rather than address Conference twice, he would formally close it. He went on to give apologies for General Secretary, Bob Crow, and newly elected President, Alex Gordon who could not attend as they were attending a solidarity visit to Palestine.

Chair’s Welcome & Announcements

Greg Hewitt thanked Conference for electing him this year and proposed a vote of thanks for Jim Philp who previously held the position. Greg announced that sadly Jim had been made redundant in December and that he was currently unemployed.

Unfortunately, Guest Speaker Jim McAuslan, the general Secretary of BALPA had to withdraw at the last moment as the union is holding strike ballots. Lancaster branch decided to withdraw their motion on Tebay but requested the floor to explain their decision which was granted by the Chair. A late motion from Humber shipping had been circulated and placed on delegates’ seats. Alan Jones, from the London Orphan fund was present to collect donations.

Proposal from Manchester Victoria and seconded by Manchester South, for a minute’s silence to commemorate those who lost their lives at Grayrigg. This was passed unanimously.

The Chair commented on the bad year the Union has had with some employers and Network Rail in particular with all the proposed and ongoing cuts being made. He wanted to pay tribute to Health & Safety reps and recognised that negotiating has often been difficult over the past 12 months. He also thanked the reps for taking time out of their busy schedules to attend the conference and associated training session.
Guest Speaker

Michael Woods - Head of Operation and Management Research, Rail Safety and Standards Board.

Michael has been with the RSSB since 2004 and his responsibilities are to select, manage and publish research projects designed to improve cost effective safety and business performance on the UK Rail network. The areas he covers are Operations, Health & Public Behaviour and Road/Rail Interfaces.

Michael explained that the Rail Safety & Standards Board was formally known as Railway Safety. His department managed the Rail Industry's research program which is government funded via the tax payer and a levy from industry bodies, TOCs, FOCs and infrastructure companies. The research ideas come from “Joe Public”, to academics, to staff focus groups and unions. He explained that research criteria were strict and had to be adhered to as the funding came from the public purse. Nonetheless, the RSSB remains pretty independent and not everyone agrees with the outcomes that the research presents - quite often the managers of railways staff! However, this is a partnership and lessons need to be learned ideas taken on that best suit the industry.

Some of the research groups have union reps and some do not. Operations Focus Group, which manages the biggest area of research has representation from the RMT. Trade union influence is very important in RSSB’s work and more often than not, trade union reps will be co-opted onto the research project groups particularly where the project will directly affect the workers.

CIRAS is part of the RSSB but they have a locked room and sealed computers which are inaccessible to anyone who doesn't directly work on the reports which assures confidentiality.

Also run national programs on sustainable development, manage Ops Web which holds a wealth of information on the operations side of the industry - Red Alert is run by Ops Web and they will soon be making a DVD on shunting. We also manage the process of Railway Group Standards and give general technical advice which often results in technical standards being published. RSSB also has a website dedicated to Human Factors which includes advice taken from the different transport industries - aviation, road transport and sea faring.

Although our research on occupational health is possibly the smallest area, it's one of the most important. Recent topics have included Deep Vein Thrombosis and the industry's reaction to an ageing population in terms of disabled passengers and an ageing workforce.

Michael referred to the RSSB Health Research Projects booklet that it freely available to download from their website at:

http://www.rssb.co.uk/pdf/reports/research/T822_guide_final.pdf

He went on in further detail about projects concerned with fatigue that his department had been involved with. In particular a lengthy report published in 2006 dealing with passenger train drivers and fatigue. The impetus came from after the Southall Train Enquiry, which Michael was involved with when he worked for the ORR. He acknowledges that research
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into Human Factors and Fatigue Management was in its infancy back then. The aim of the research was to “optimise - cost effectively - changes to shift work planning & practice to reduce safety risks particularly from SPADS and to improve human performance and productivity. Further benefits such as absenteeism, disruption, delays, damage etc were also sought.” The result was a booklet entitled ‘Coping with Shift Work & Fatigue’ and (downloadable from the web or contact Paul to order). It contains tips on how to manage shift work and sleep patterns.

RMT is working with the RSSB on a number of projects currently including; The Effects of Alcohol on Safety & Security, Developing Non-Technical Skills, Work-Related Violence and Lone Working.

**Guest Speaker**

Rob Miles - Principal Specialist Inspector: Human Factors, Health & Safety Executive

Leads on the topic of Human and Organisational Factors for the Offshore division of the HSE. He is assisted by a team of Specialist H&OF Inspectors providing inspection, enforcement and advice to the UK offshore industry on topics from organisational and behavioral change to user interfaces. His particular interests include safety management systems, shift work, competence, behavior modification, and drug abuse in the workplace.

Rob talked about the different approaches to managing working hours and how a balance needed to be achieved between Regulation and individual freedoms. On the one hand there is the Working Time Directive which sets down breaks and the duty to record hours and on the other breaches of the law which are punishable. We also have the situation that some jobs are excluded from the provisions of the Directive such as the Taxi Sector. He explained that the impact regulation can have on individual freedoms needed to be weighed against excessive over-time working and care taken that employers don’t extend working hours as a habit. Some employers will think of an emergency as a risk to profit and shareholders when it should be a risk to life and limb.

The science of fatigue is not exact and in some cases is extremely dodgy and there can be pressures put on the numbers if they are not backed by sound science. Following the Texas City disaster the oil industry consulted on API775 – A Fatigue Risk Management System - and the US unions walked out of talks but the employers were forced back into discussion by the American Government. The US is of course the land of “I’ll work as many hours as I want” but the US unions have moved away from this approach and recognise that less hours mean more jobs, more jobs means more members and more members mean greater union power.

You also have to question the employers approach to managing fatigue and staffing workplaces. In the off-shore sector you can have oil platforms make £100 million a day and they want to save money by cutting two maintenance jobs on the platform and making others work longer hours. What is the sense in that approach?

Fatigue is almost always identified as part of the underlying causes of accidents and if tackled it can have a larger effect in stopping many different causes of accidents. Rob recalled an example of a fatigue study at Cardiff University where they subjected individuals to sleep
deprivation and saw no loss in performance but then watched one participant crash his car as he left the car park.

HSE look for a number of different issues when doing workplace fatigue inspections:

- Overtime records.
- Contractors’ hours.
- Watching individual workers to see if they are tired.
- Look at risk assessments
- Look at the causes of accidents and incidents.

Rob concluded by examining various management structures and the guidance given by HSE in ‘HSG(48) Reducing Error and Influencing Behaviour’ by asking the delegates to think about what they should be asking management about job design, individual worker factors and planning and organisation of management of the workplace. The key question to ask employers is ‘do you have enough resources to get the job done safely?’

His final call was to remember confidential reporting services like CIRAS who do look at incidences of fatigue where members do not feel confident in reporting issues to management. CIRAS can force management to act in these cases.

Questions from delegates followed the presentations.

RESOLUTIONS

1. Signalers’ Fatigue - Carried

2. The National Health, Safety and Welfare Advisory Conference - Carried

3. Inviting Employers Management Representatives to Address The RMT Health and Safety Conference - Fell

4. RMT Branches Supporting RMT Health, Safety and Welfare Representatives - Carried

5. Attending the Health, Safety and Welfare Advisory Conference - Paid Release and Travel Facilities for All - Carried

6. Regulation of Health, Safety and Welfare - Carried

7. Blacklisting of Health, Safety and Welfare Representatives - Carried
8. A Charter for Health, Safety and Welfare Representatives - Carried


10. Lack of Consultation Manual Handling - Carried

11. Effective Communication During Times of Disruption - Carried

12. Seafarers and the Working Time Directive - Carried

Closing Address

Senior Assistant General Secretary - Mick Cash

Mick thanked everyone for their attendance and remarked that while figures were slightly down on last year this conference still had the highest number of delegates to any RMT Conference. He noted that the organisation was very good but that it still could do with some streamlining. With this in mind, he reported that the timeline for nominations and resolutions would tighten up and this would be agreed at the next Advisory Committee meeting.

He welcomed the new Health & Safety Advisory Committee members and thanked them for their input and for choosing the theme. He went on that as the training element was proving to be very popular and successful, the format would continue.

The specialist courses developed by the Health & Safety section will be briefed to our lay tutors later in the year and will then be rolled out nationally via the regional offices. Contact your Regional Organiser for further information.