

## Occupational health opportunity relegated in White Paper

More emphasis should have been placed on the link between occupational and general health in the Government's recently published White Paper on reforming health and social care.

This is according to IOSH, which was responding to the White Paper, entitled *Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services*, and published at the end of January. The document sets a new direction for the whole health and social care system and aims to shift delivery of services from hospital to primary care, and to increase the focus on prevention and earlier intervention.

Original proposals for free health checks at key life stages have been watered down to online assessments, to IOSH's chagrin.

While welcoming the Government's

initiatives on prevention and the intended stronger focus on community services, Neil Budworth, president of the Institution, said: "The proposed MoTs could have provided an opportunity for GPs to identify serious work-related health problems, and we hope the online questionnaire will include these important issues. IOSH has previously called for trainee GPs to receive occupational health training, which is vital in supporting the country's 28 million workers."

He added: "With 28 million days lost last year to work-related ill health and two million people suffering illness they believe was caused or made worse by work, we need everyone to pull in the same direction."

The White Paper is available at [www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications](http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications)

## Community-based safety body formed



A new body which aims to become a key player in promoting occupational safety and health in the UK was launched at the end of January by former HSE deputy director-general, David Eves (pictured).

Safety Groups UK, formerly the National Health and Safety Groups Council, will coordinate a network of around 80 community-based groups giving advice to small and medium-sized businesses in their local area.

Chairman Kerry Ross said: "In the past, the groups have been one of the country's best kept secrets. Made up of representatives from local businesses they provide low-cost health and safety help through such things as seminars and advice lines."

In a partnership deal, the HSE is providing funding for a research consultant, while the Groups will support strategic HSE priorities such as slips and trips, falls from height, workplace transport, stress, and musculoskeletal disorders.

IOSH has given its backing to the new body and is represented on its council by director of professional affairs, Hazel Harvey.

### HSE to take part in Government's energy review

The HSE has been asked by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to contribute to the Government's Energy Review, which will consider all aspects of the energy system, including energy supply and demand and current energy challenges.

The Executive is to provide an expert report assessing potential risks associated with new energy developments, and setting out its regulatory approach to ensuring these risks are sensibly managed by industry.

Geoffrey Podger, HSE chief executive, said: "Safety is an important consideration in this Review and HSE welcomes the Government's recognition of this. There are risks associated with energy generation and distribution, as with most industrial activity."

The HSE has established a project team to deliver a report by the end of June 2006.

### IN BRIEF

#### Safety continues to be top concern of fleet managers

Nearly half the fleet managers who responded to a recent survey carried out by Lex Vehicle Leasing (LVL) put health and safety issues as their top management priority, for the fourth year running.

The research found that duty of care for drivers was managers' biggest headache, ahead of vehicle running costs. Three-quarters also felt that smoking in company cars should be banned by law.

John Walden, MD of LVL, said: "It is good that so many companies realise that corporate liability is a real issue and one that is going to remain on the fleet agenda."

#### Fire reform delayed



The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, which was due to come into force next month, is not now likely to appear until October. In a written statement released by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in January, Fire safety minister, Jim Fitzpatrick, said: "Despite extensive work with all stakeholders it is clear that all the guidance documents will not be ready for a full 12-week gap between publication and coming

into force on 1 April 2006. . . we have therefore concluded that the coming into force of the . . . RRO should be put back". To find out more visit

[www.firesafetyguides.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.firesafetyguides.odpm.gov.uk)

#### Young workers and good practice

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work is inviting nominations for the seventh European Good Practice Awards. The Awards, part of European Safety at Health at Work Week, which this year focuses on young people in the workplace, recognise businesses, educational establishments and training providers who are implementing innovative measures to ensure that young people make a safe start in their working lives, or who are promoting risk awareness and prevention among this

vulnerable group. For more information visit <http://ew2006.osha.eu.int>

#### Asbestos exemption?

The HSE is to examine research claiming that the health risks from asbestos cement are lower than previously thought. A paper from John Bridle of Asbestos Watchdog seen by SHP claims that research shows that chrysotile in asbestos cement induces changes to the fibres meaning they are significantly different to raw chrysotile. Bridle says this will mean that asbestos cement products will no longer be covered by asbestos regulations. The HSE said that it will look at the report, but it was too early to confirm possible actions. It added, however, that white asbestos is subject to an EU wide-ban.