

Health and Safety in the Forestry Commission

1. Purpose

To provide the Board with an update on the management of health and safety in the Forestry Commission (FC).

2. Introduction

The Forestry Commission Health and Safety Strategy has been in place since June 2013. The Health and Safety Strategy Group has steered delivery against this Strategy on behalf of the Executive Board. The responsibility for implementation of many of the actions lies with the Countries and Central Services.

3. FC Staff Health and Safety

As part of the launch of the Strategy the Health and Safety Strategy Group asked teams from across the FC to feedback their thoughts on how we could manage health and safety better. The main area of concern raised in the feedback was our health and safety culture. Health and safety culture is defined as "the way we do things around here".

In January this year we ran the Safety Climate Tool survey. This is an on-line survey software tool that helps organisations measure their health and safety culture, explore individual's attitudes and perceptions and provide evidence based suggestions for improvement.

The FC Survey Results showed the factors with the most favourable responses were:

- Organisational commitment – the plant/site encourages suggestions on how to improve health and safety (80% agree/ strongly agree)
- Health and safety trust – the plant/site really cares about the health and safety of the people who work here (77% agree/strongly agree).

The factors with less favourable responses and ideas of what we could do were:

| Areas for improvement: | What we can do? |
|---|---|
| <i>Engagement in health and safety</i> - my supervisor often talks to me about health and safety (18% disagree /strongly disagree). | Lead by example: talk regularly to staff about health and safety. |
| <i>Accident and near miss reporting</i> – near misses are always reported (42% disagree / strongly disagree) | Lead by example: report near misses and encourage teams to report them. Thank people for reporting near misses. |

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| <p><i>Usability of procedures</i> – some health and safety procedures are not really practicable (36% disagree / strongly disagree)</p> | <p>Release staff and give them time to get involved in writing, reviewing and implementing procedures. Staff need to understand what to do and why, have the skills to do it and value the outcome.</p> |
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The message is clear – if we want to continue to build upon our successes to date, leaders must continue to lead by example and be seen to do so. This is particularly important (and difficult) as we are going through a period of significant change. It is also clear that as we move our health and safety procedures into the countries, we must make them easier to use and clearly explain to people why they are important. Against this background the number of accidents in the FC remains at broadly the same level. Our incidents have increased as we have improved our understanding of the importance near miss reporting. (See table below):

| | RIDDOR accidents | | Non-RIDDOR accidents | | Incidents No. |
|-------|------------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|------------------|
| | No. | No. per 100k | No. | No. per 100k | |
| 12/13 | 21 | 707 | 136 | 4576 | 439 |
| 13/14 | 11 | 439 | 145 | 5791 | 593 |
| 14/15 | 15 | 627 | 150 | 6268 | 1444 |

The main health and safety problems that the FC experiences are:

- Chainsaws:** From our Accident and Incident Reporting System we know that in the last 12 months there have been 16 injury accidents where the operator has been using a chainsaw. 7 of these involved the operator being “hit by” a tree or a branch. 5 were injuries to an eye. 3 were as a result of a slip / trip and one was a crushed hand. Of these 16 accidents, 8 involved employees, 5 were on Standing Sales and 3 were on direct contract sites. We also know that there was a fatal chainsaw accident in NRW where the operator was “hit by” a hung up tree.
- Slips/Trips:** make up 31% of all our accidents (32% last year).
- Electricity:** 40 near misses (16 last year) this increase is due to better reporting of goalpost damage as a result of improved contract management.
- Lyme disease:** has increased from 1 reported case to 7.

Work to improve our management of these issues is ongoing. They include:

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- **Chainsaws:** Improving our decision making on when to use chainsaws. Continuing to manage contracts using Pre-commencement Meeting Gateways and Red/Amber Green system of contract management. Working with FISA to improve systems for felling edge trees.
- **Slips/Trips:** The Scotland Health and Safety Committee invited Chris Pike from Tilhill Forestry to share their approach to slips and trips. He advised that we should have a look at the attitudes and communication around the topic before we look at the practical side in order to get end users on board. The Committee agreed to seek feedback from people in the business and then put together a campaign.
- **Electricity:** SH&E have conducted an audit of our management of Electricity in Scotland and will be doing one in England by the end of March 2016.
- **Tick borne disease:** We have run a poster campaign to raise awareness of tick borne diseases. We have also investigated the potential benefits of 'tick-proof' clothing and run a trial. The results show a dramatic reduction in the number of tick bites. No ill health effects were reported. This indicates that this type of clothing would provide significant benefits in reducing the risk of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases if implemented alongside the FC's current approach. We are currently working on a procurement exercise.

4. Members of the public health and safety

In 2015 we have had a number of serious member of the public accidents. These include:

- A mountain bike accident on the Isle of Wight in August. A man went over the handlebars of his bike and died as a result of his injuries. The accident was on a "wild trail".
- A visitor has died on the Winlatter Go Ape site. It appears that he died of a heart attack. He had to be rescued from height. The mountain rescue and air ambulance were also called to site. FC staff were involved in the management of the incident.
- A man who was injured in February when he went over the handle bars of his bike died from his injuries in August. The accident has been fully investigated.
- A young mountainbiker participating in an Enduro event went over the handle bars of his bike and was seriously injured. SH&E were involved in the investigation as the jump was on FC land.

5. Resource Implications

The implementation of the Health and Safety Strategy and action plans do require a commitment of resource over a sustained period, particularly in terms of FC staff time.

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Over time, some savings are likely to arise as was found in the construction industry where improvements in safety went hand in hand with improvements in efficiency.

6. Risk Assessment

As we work through the fundamental changes of the Countries setting up their own arrangements for Health & Safety, there are risks that the improvements we have made in our safety culture and our management of health and safety will not be maintained or built on.

| Risk Component | Potential Consequences | Controls |
|---|---|--|
| Failure to maintain and build on our improving health and safety culture. | No improvement in our health and safety performance. | Build on the feedback from the Safety Climate Tool survey results. Maintain health and safety messages as part of the change management. |
| Failure to manage our recreation undertaking and facilities. | Increase in number of accidents. Greater chance of very serious accident leading to high civil claim. | Build and maintain facilities that are fit for purpose. Ensure that staff understand what to do and why, have the skills to do it and value the outcome. |

7. Communications Issues

We have representatives from the Communications team on the Health and Safety Strategy Group. They advised and supported the launch of the Health and Safety Strategy. Their advice on the launch of the Safety Climate Tool helped with the communication of the results and follow up actions. This work is on-going and will develop as we get feedback from local health and safety Committees.

7. Implementation and Evaluation Proposals

Ongoing.

8. Recommendation

The Board is asked to note the results of the Safety Climate Tool Survey and the ongoing work being done to change our health and safety culture and improve our performance.

Emily Ramsay
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