

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
Notes of workshop on assuring the health and safety of offsite workers held on
Monday 8th December 2008 at
RoSPA House, Edgbaston Park, Birmingham B5 7ST

Introduction

This note reports on the main issues discussed at a workshop on assuring the health and safety of offsite workers held at RoSPA House, Edgbaston Park, Birmingham on Monday 8th December 2008.

Attendance

Annex 1

Apologies were received from:

| | |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| Simon Allen | Spice Plc |
| Sharon Baxter | E.ON Energy |
| Ian Clay | Chesterfield Borough Council |
| Nick Cook | Journalist |
| Nikki Finlay | E.ON Energy |
| Jayne Payne | Npower |
| Paul Reeve | ECA |
| Hugh Robertson | TUC |
| Richard Ward | Affinity Solutions |
| Paul Johnston | Affinity Solutions |

Welcome and introductions

Following round table introductions and coverage of domestic arrangements, Roger Bibbings, Occupational Safety Adviser, introduced the workshop. He explained that, with funding from E.ON, RoSPA was developing a stream of work in this area to help find solutions to health and safety problems faced by organisations whose employees deliver services to the public, for example, visiting people in their own homes. The aim of the workshop was to explore these issues in more detail and to identify possible solutions.

The range of services within scope of the project was very diverse, for example: postal delivery; dot com delivery; contractors installing, maintaining or repairing services; meter reading; social services; council and housing association employees; health services; care workers; enforcement activities; emergency services; building and planning regulation; journalists; volunteer services; and even fund raisers and campaigners. Although domestic premises might appear to be a relatively benign environment, reports identified by RoSPA suggested that risks on occasions might be significant. Some organisations were reporting higher than expected rates of slips and trips, hazards such as dangerous dogs, access problems on occasions and often risks associated with violence and aggression.

Roger explained that work was proceeding in four phases:

Phase 1, recently completed, had involved initial scoping of the issues. A copy of an article on this subject by Nick Cook from the current edition of RoSPA's monthly magazine 'OSH', had been circulated, identifying and describing the problem and helping to build up an early picture of some of the job roles involved, the problems faced by employees and some of the solutions currently adopted.

Phase 2 now involved organising the workshop in order to engage key organisations to carry forward the scoping work and to identify areas for further study and immediate cooperation. A special interactive web area might also be developed to permit reporting and sharing of good practice. Maximum use would be made of RoSPA's Ebulletins and 'Safety Connections' service.

Depending on the outcome of the workshop, *Phase 3* would involve an extended study period, gathering and reviewing statistical information, reviewing accident and incident reports and comparing efficacy of similar solutions to common problems in a variety of settings.

Phase 4 would be the development of a final report with recommendations, the consolidation of a communications network and the development of practical training and briefing tools.

Roger Bibbings explained that the above plans would be flexible since the workshop would play an important part in showing the way ahead.

Presentations on company experiences

- 1 **Jamie Fogg from Lloyd's Pharmacy** made a presentation.
(please see Annex 2)
- 2 **Irene Lloyd-Butler - Severn Trent**
The main health and safety issues for their offsite workers had been dog bites. However, since guidance had been introduced, to always have dogs put away before entering premises and to use post it pens for delivering notes, this type of incident had reduced significantly.
RTAs had been increasing since chevrons had been fitted to their work vans, the accidents were mainly third party and this was being looked into.
Health and safety training for offsite workers had been made more interactive, which helped to get the message across.
Most offsite workers were home based so all used mobile phones for contact with the company, Severn Trent itself ran the messaging system which enabled them to send group texts to workers regarding weather warnings etc.
- 3 **Gill McKenzie – Npower**
Although Npower was seen as an office based organisation, they had a high number of offsite workers; meter readers, maintenance and repairs, gas

engineers.

The induction for new workers included one day training on Health and Safety issues. There were also home safety issues with risks associated with working in lofts etc. Anyone who used a company car also had to complete driver training.

They had had some serious attacks on their offsite workers. These had all been on field service advisers. The field service advisers were usually short term workers and represented a mixed and varied group. The turnover was high and it was difficult to get this group of workers to take Health and Safety issues seriously.

Those who had a car allowance and used their own car for work purposes did not have a duty to report accidents and there was an issue with how to encourage them to do so.

4 **Mark Varley – E.ON UK**

The company had had a vast increase of field workers in a very short space of time and this had led to a dramatic increase in accidents.

The metering side of the business was more mature and had well established health and safety policy in place. These offsite workers had far fewer incidents.

The company had started to look into solutions to the health and safety issues of offsite workers and had employed an MSc student to investigate. They would be developing a methodology and would be happy to share the analysis in due course.

One of the findings was that the management of Health and Safety was a major issue. The managers of offsite workers needed to understand that they had to manage the health and safety of their employees not just encourage sales.

They were focusing on simple good and bad behaviours. For example they had found that workers were tripping and falling because they were looking at their equipment/paperwork while walking – very simple bad behaviour. They had also employed the services of the Suzy Lamplugh trust to help with personal safety policy.

The number of attacks on offsite workers had increased, maybe because of the nature of the industry.

They were looking at profiles of the people having accidents. They had found that a high accident rate indicated a high absence rate (the absence was not linked to the accident but the rates were parallel).

For field sales workers most accidents were in the first three months of employment, and that these reported incidents were not necessarily real.

They were not getting information about near-miss accidents as workers did not see the reason for reporting them.

The solution was to change behaviour through repetition, reporting and analysis.

5. **EDF Energy - Paul Mason**

EDF also had experienced many of the incidents and issues that had been raised.

All drivers were given driver training.

Although the number of accidents had not reduced significantly they were mainly minor incidents.

Their mobile phone policy was: engine on - phone off

They provided behavioural training.

Topic group discussions

After an initial discussion the workshop then split into four topic groups:

1. Violence and personal safety (including dangerous dogs)
2. Preventing slips and trips
3. Work related road safety (including pedestrian safety)
4. Reporting and investigation
5. 'Door knockers'

Initial discussion

It was suggested that there were a number of barriers to good health and safety. One of these was customer pressure. Too many customers wanted the job done regardless. A suggested solution was for managers to provide a company card that stated "I am unable to complete the work today because of the following Health and Safety issue..." with a telephone number for the company which the customer could ring to confirm it was company policy and not a personal view.

Another barrier was time pressure. Workers often needed to finish their job list on time or early.

Sales pressure too sometimes meant workers wanting to make a sale regardless due to financial incentives or management pressures.

Workers not staying in the job long enough was another barrier. The company might not

think it was worthwhile to give them health and safety equipment. Because they did not stay long workers might not be interested in health and safety training. An example: given was that of 'door knockers' doing essentially the same work (from a health and safety point of view) as meter readers etc but not given the same health and safety training or equipment. A suggested solution was to learn from meter readers who had a well established and mature health and safety policy that could be used for all offsite working.

It was suggested that managers cannot realistically predict and provide guidance on everything, so it was necessary to empower workers themselves through training and through support.

Training needed to be made interactive with use of real life examples. Employers could conduct personal profiling (similar to driver profiling) to identify training needs. Similarly there might be scope for personal risk assessments.

Risk awareness training could help enable workers to recognise potential risks. Social skills training could give workers skills to diffuse potentially volatile situations. Driver training could be provided for all workers who drive for work

There was clearly scope to share good practice guidance on personal safety including dealing with risks posed by animals (including dogs and geese).

Workers had to have the confidence to refuse to work where they felt at risk, with support and back up from their line manager or supervisor. Another option was to develop mentors, for example, to enable less confident workers to interact with more experienced colleagues. Quality mentors who understood the job, who were experienced and had good communication skills, had a key role to play.

In this context supervisors needed to be used to influence behaviour, changing behaviour through repetition, reporting and analysis. One study quoted showed that only four positive health and safety conversations per year were enough to influence behaviour.

A major problem however was how to have enough face-to-face contact with home based workers to make them feel part of the organisation and keep in contact.

Often supervisors had too many workers to supervise, with not enough time, and there were not enough 'good quality' mentors. When workers were not being observed or forgot they were being observed, they tended to return to poor health and safety behaviours.

Buffet lunch

At 12.30 the workshop broke for a buffet and networking.

Reports back from topic groups

At 13.15 participants re-grouped for reports back from the Groups.

The key points from each group were as follows:

1. Driving

It was agreed that the risks from driving and working on the highway were quite significant for offsite workers. It was observed that Managing Occupational Road Risk was now a mature subject but it was also asked whether more specific guidance was needed for offsite workers.

Mobile phone use was another major issue. One company present had a clear rule, 'engine is on, phone off'. Exceptions however included workers on emergency call-outs who could leave their phone on and pull over at a safe location to check for any calls.

There needed to be a clear policy of reporting all accidents, including when using own car for work purposes.

Employers had a duty to provide driver training to all drivers and managers needed to check licences and insurance documents at least once a year.

One company represented said that they had a problem with 'rear ending' by third parties due to the nature of work, with staff also distracted by looking for addresses/turnings etc.

It was suggested that there might be value in producing a DVD on road safety aimed specifically at offsite workers.

2. Slips and Trips

Some representatives had had issues with fictitious reporting of accidents (slip, trips and falls).

The reported incidents rarely had any witnesses and supposed injuries were sprains or strains not impact injuries.

Some suggested reasons for fictitious reporting of slips, trips or falls included:

- end of probation period,
- sickness absence policy

One company present had a policy that all incidents must be reported immediately and had no experience of fictitious incidents.

Companies needed to capture near misses and hazards data and use the information effectively.

Many reports did not include how the slip, trip or fall occurred.

Workers needed to be encouraged to report all hazards (broken steps etc).

Workers' footwear needed to be suitable for the activity and conditions.

Accidents getting in and out of vehicles could be reduced by looking at step design and behaviour – workers were often distracted by looking at paperwork.

Getting equipment out of vans led to slips, trips and falls inside vehicles, this could be reduced by arranging tool storage and using vehicles designed to access tools safely from the outside.

When carrying equipment the correct 'bag' should be used that to leave hands free where possible.

Workers needed to feel confident to say to their managers they couldn't work because they felt unsafe and not feel that they had to 'get on with it' regardless.

3. Accident Reporting:

It must be made clear to workers what needed to be reported.

- Hazard
- Near Miss
- Slip – no fall
- Slip – fall but no injury

Organisations needed to promote a good reporting culture, all incidents (and near misses) to be reported straight away (within 24 hours). The reporting process must be straight forward and easy.

The data collected needed to be used. Workers who reported incidents needed to be given feedback and kept informed about lessons learned.

If it isn't getting measured it won't get managed!

4. Personal Safety – Violence

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust had a lot of useful guidance. www.suzylamplugh.org/

The best advice would be to not work alone but this was not always an option.

Workers needed training to enable them to make the right judgement in any situation, to identify risk and learn skills to diffuse potentially volatile situations.

It was important that workers knew their location and kept their managers up to date with their movements.

Workers were often not familiar with the areas they were working in. It was asked whether information on potentially hazardous areas could be shared, for example, where other companies had had issues with people or areas where police or social services knew there were problems, but it was pointed out that data protection meant that this kind of information could not be released.

A suggested solution was for workers to carry an ID card that included GPS and a voice recorder, the device could be switched on discreetly by the concerned worker and the incident monitored by the manager and assistance sent out if needed.

It was important that any workers who had experienced violence (threatening behaviour or abuse) at work had access to support, via advice lines or from their occupational health teams.

5. Door Knockers

Workers who knocked on doors included volunteers and field sales workers.

One issue was that organisations needed to find the right people for the job and make sure they were prepared for and aware of the risks before they started. Health and Safety should be the first thing covered in the induction and include real life stories and their consequences.

The main issue was management, ensuring all workers had had relevant training and that they were encouraged to report any incidents and discuss any safety issues.

Managers had to make it clear to their workers that safety was a priority and that they would be supported and listened to.

Workers needed to have some face to face contact with managers and feel part of the organisation. They needed to have the health and safety message reinforced regularly.

Plenary discussion

In discussion a number of points were raised: It was agreed that the main challenge was to increase the competence of line managers who have to manage the health and safety of their offsite workers. There was a need to encourage managers to:

- 1 make health and safety a priority for their workers and
- 2 reinforce the health and safety message, in particular by
- 3 asking workers about Health and Safety issues and problems,
- 4 being open to workers' health and safety concerns,
- 5 promoting a reporting culture – being clear about what incidents need to be reported and the information that needs to be included
- 6 (“If it isn't getting measured it won't get managed”),
- 7 make reporting incidents easy, and
- 8 supporting and encouraging workers NOT to work where they feel there is a risk.

The next steps might be to produce a recognised management standard with linked toolkits for managing the safety of offsite workers and for managers of 'door knockers'.

As a first step RoSPA might seek to collate best practice for offsite workers on: dogs, driving and deliveries, slips and trips, personal safety, accident reporting and lone working.

For example, guidance on dogs might include the following:

- 1 only work when dogs have been shut away,
- 2 if the customer refuses to shut the dog away, it is your right and company policy not to work,
- 3 carry 'bite back' spray,
- 4 use post it pens to make notes on documentation of dangers from dogs.

It was important to support workers' decisions not to work when dogs were not shut away – and ensure this is company policy.

After further discussion it was agreed that the focus of the next phase of the project would be on developing the competence of line managers of dispersed teams, including staff who visit members of the public in their own homes. The aim would be to develop a suite of tools and guidance.

Tea and close

The workshop closed at 15.15. Roger Bibbings thanked everyone for their input. It was agreed that a note would be circulated to all who had attended as well as to those who had had to give their apologies.

Roger Bibbings
Occupational Safety Adviser

5th January 2009

Annex 1: Attendance List

Workshop on assuring the health and safety of offsite workers

Monday 8th December 2008 10.30 am – 3.00 pm

RoSPA

Attendance list

| | | | |
|--------|--------------|--|--|
| Janis | Baugh | Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals | |
| Roger | Bibbings | RoSPA | |
| David | Bryant | Consultant | |
| Neil | Budworth | E.ON | |
| Jimmy | Challoner | UNISON | |
| Nathan | Davies | RoSPA | |
| Jamie | Fogg | Lloydspharmacy | |
| Helen | Gillett | British Red Cross | |
| Stuart | Lee | MeterPlus | |
| Irene | Lloyd-Butler | Severn Trent Water | |
| Sonya | Madden | Severn Trent Water | |
| Paul | Mason | EDF | |
| Gill | McKenzie | npower | |
| Mark | Varley | E.ON UK | |
| David | Wallington | BT | |
| Linda | Wright | E.ON UK | |
| Ian | Yorkston | Scottish Power | |

Annex 2- Jamie Fogg, Lloyd's Pharmacy

Offsite & Lone Working - Issues & Observations

Not just dog attacks but also geese attacks!! (therefore need to consider rural locations not just urban)

Staff 'doing their own thing'

- Collecting a bag of potatoes from the greengrocer.
- Tracker device fitted to delivery van clearly demonstrating driver returned to his home address for 1 ½ hrs when he should have been on his rounds.

Self selection in some instances – delivery drivers living in the vicinity of high crime areas – aware of the issues and willing to deliver to these areas (perception of risk?)

Health, Safety & Environment

Lloydspharmacy
Your local health authority



Offsite & Lone Working - Issues & Observations

Staff visiting areas (Head Office functions) where they do not have local knowledge – at a higher risk?

Job design causes issues;

Job & finish for delivery drivers does encourage them to cut corners and disregard safe working methods.

E.g. strict instruction to delivery drivers when delivering cases of wine (10 – 15 bottles per case) to only carry one case at a time. Personally observed a driver put a case under one arm, then another case under the other arm and close the van door with his foot!!

Health, Safety & Environment

Lloydspharmacy
Your local health authority



Offsite & Lone Working - Issues & Observations

Meeting the needs of customers may increase risks;
E.g. early evening delivery times to suit the customer may increase the risks? More anti-social behaviour than during the daytime?

Sharing of information relating to potential risks between organisations / businesses - via a central database?

