

National Occupational Safety and Health Committee (NOSHC)

Friday 5th February 2016

ENA update

Electricity industry Powering Improvement (PI) strategy

** Working with Contractors 2015*

The new five year phase of the Powering Improvement initiative was launched in 2015 and work progressed last year with the theme of working in partnership with contractors. A number of key industry contracting businesses presented at National HESAC meetings throughout the year outlining their approach to managing health and safety. This helps bring industry, trade unions and the HSE together to improve health and safety performance in the electricity sector.

A Powering Improvement workshop was then held in October to continue the constructive engagement with the contractor community, which focussed on working together to share best practice, learn from experience and manage common risks. Presentations and discussion outlined the approach to and benefits of working in partnership with DNOs. A report was published on the Powering Improvement web site. As per previous years the work will culminate in the publication of an Annual Review and a SHE Review outlining a number of contractor case studies and industry partnerships and alliances.

** Powering Improvement 2016*

The delivery plan for 2016 has been drafted by the ENA Occupational Health Committee and the ENA SHE Managers Group and the work overseen by the Powering Improvement Steering Group. Discussions have been held with all three major occupational health forums within the industry, ENA Occupational Health Committee, Energy UK Occupational Health Forum and the Occupational Health Advisory Group, to establish the key messages to be included in the Delivery Plan. This will build on the good work carried out in this area in 2011 and ensure that the vital matter of the health of workers remains high on the agenda within the industry.

** Asset Management*

A number of asset management and corporate memory workshops also continue to be held with member companies as this remains a core risk for the industry. The workshops are based around incidents and case studies from within the industry to help ensure lessons from past incidents are reinforced and not forgotten.

** Middle Managers*

A joint collaboration project with the International Social Security Association (ISSA) Electricity Section has led to the publication of a booklet 'Guidance for the Management of Health & Safety Performance'. This is designed to support and empower middle managers in the electricity industry to be more effective in managing health and safety within their overall role through the provision of simple, practical information and tools. This publication was launched with a presentation in Trier, Germany and is now available on the Powering Improvement web site: (www.poweringimprovement.org). The next project identified will be a similar collaborative effort looking at developing guidance on the challenges of company/contractor relationships and joint working.

SHE Management Conference

Plans for the 2016 SHE Management Conference are progressing. The conference will be hosted by Northern Ireland Electricity at the Belfast Hilton Hotel on 11-13th May 2016. The draft programme is now largely complete featuring sessions on health, environment, road risk and leadership/culture and is available via the ENA web site: (www.energynetworks.org/events/she-conference/she-conference-2016/she-management-conference-2016)

Working with HSE

The current HSE Strategy, 'Be part of the solution', is being replaced with a new strategy, which is being promoted at launch events around the UK. ENA Member Companies are participating in these events to outline how both individual company initiatives and Powering Improvement will help support the new strategy. It is expected that the individual Sector Strategies (including electricity) will be revisited after the launch of the new strategy.

A new Occupational Health strategy is also being developed and it is expected that this will be published in spring 2016; the Powering Improvement 2016 focus on health will need to be aligned to this.

Electromagnetic Fields (EMF)

In June 2013 the European Commission published Directive 2013/35/EU on the minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to the risks arising from electromagnetic fields. A public consultation on the transposition of the EMF Directive via new UK Regulations, 'The Control of Electromagnetic Fields at Work Regulations 2016', has now completed and the new Regulations will come into force in July 2016.

National Grid is leading on the development of a national Risk Assessment document that is being drafted for the electricity industry to help companies demonstrate compliance with the new requirements, although most of the necessary precautions and procedures are already in place. The detailed Risk Assessment essentially details how to assess exposure levels for both employees and members of the public. There will also be a need to raise awareness of the new requirements and carry out refresher training of staff where necessary

Working at Height

An ENA Work at Height Task Force has been set up to consider and develop where appropriate improved standards of health and safety for work at height (WaH) practices within the electricity industry. The Task Force has been established following advice from HSE to review existing industry WaH working practices and in light of reported incidents in the industry over the last few years.

Having reviewed current procedures and policies on WaH both at company and industry level, the group is developing a new high level guidance document on various different assets within Electricity Networks (i.e. Towers, Poles, Substations, Plant and other structures). The group envisage that this new proposed document will supersede an existing ENA Position Paper on Working at Height.

Appendix

RoSPA Apprentice consultation

The electricity networks industry has well established apprenticeship programmes and all of the companies have such schemes in place to varying degrees. In the main these are centred on the core operational roles required to maintain the current and future networks.

Whilst the training programme initially focuses on basic induction and orientation, new starters are soon introduced to the technical skills that will be required irrespective of the final role or career route taken. This is then developed into training in three main technical fields areas namely Jointing, Fitting and Overhead Line work which will help develop staff to work on distinct asset types; broadly speaking the three areas correlate to work on cables, substations and overhead electricity lines (poles and towers). Each of these three disciplines is taught via a series of modules which comprise both theoretical and practical training requirements. In order to demonstrate competence the successful completion of a number of field based projects is also required over a period of time.

Typically the in house apprenticeship programmes last between two and three years. Data on the level of incidents during this time compared to the overall industry accident rate is not currently available, but despite the expectation of increased risks with younger, less experienced staff I am not aware that this is a significant issue. It is other aspects such as time keeping, discipline, motivation, performance issues etc that are the matters that often need to be addressed.

The infrastructure required for this training is available via a number of dedicated company training centres which provide the workshop and field operational equipment required for practical training in these skills. Some of the companies are in a position to offer and charge for training services to other parties such as contractors for the training of their staff too.

The limiting factor for both in house and provided training is the number of available trainers and supervisors and the physical throughput possible which also ensures adequate and comprehensive practical training on the various asset types. Certainly there does not appear to be any problem with recruiting the number of apprentices required each year for the businesses and the courses are invariably oversubscribed. This is helped in part by the local reputation of the companies businesses as regional providers of employment, family connections in the industry (sometimes generations follow each other into the industry), and the attraction of a technical skills apprenticeship.

The current concern is the forward workforce planning requirements and the ability of the industry to increase its uptake of new staff in order to address the challenges of both a changing industry and the forthcoming loss of expertise due to an imbalance in the age profile of the workforce. Following privatisation there was a drop in the numbers of people employed and trained as the businesses adapted to new economic regulation, which includes the need to demonstrate cost efficiencies and ensure cost benefits for customers. This has led to higher levels of skilled staff in their forties and fifties who are due to retire in the next 10-15 years. Similarly the requirements to accommodate increasing levels of renewable and distributed generation on the networks, opportunities for active network management of the networks to ensure more efficient use of energy, and innovation in the form of energy storage, smart grids, smart meters and the electrification of heat networks and vehicles, means increasing numbers of trained staff, both new entrants and up-skilled personnel, are now required.

The current situation sees companies ramping up their apprentice intake where possible to meet these future demands. This is combined with work at a national level with EU Skills and the National Skills Academy for Power to both develop common training and authorisation requirements where possible, and also to help promote the industry as an attractive sector in which to work in order to increase the number of students both studying STEM subjects and then seeking a career in the wider energy industry.

This collaborative set up of companies, contractors and training provider helps provide a stronger standing in terms of presenting a uniform public face to promote the industry, the opportunity to develop common and more efficient training standards and the means to attract Government funding and support (Energy Efficiency Industrial Partnership). A common voice also adds weight to industry views on the future direction of apprenticeships being promoted by Government, whether this is in support of policy proposals or the means to provide reasoned objection; for example the current Apprenticeship Levy plans.