

Chapter 4

RoSPA's strategy

November 1997

'RoSPA's key issues' strategy'

The Society's fundamental purposes were defined in its 'Memorandum of Association' adopted in 1951 as: "To promote the safety of the public generally or any section of the public and of members of the public, whether in public or private places and whether by land, water or air and in particular for the above purpose to devise, carry out, make known, disseminate, advocate, explain and advance principles and methods of securing and furthering the prevention of and protection against accidents of all kinds."

In 1994, as a result of intensive discussion, these aims were refocused in a new and more condensed form, namely '... to enhance the quality of life by exercising a powerful influence for accident prevention'.

This new 'mission' statement has helped the Society in making hard choices about which range of activities is most appropriate to fulfil its wider purpose, taking into account the prevailing economic and business climate, government funding policies and the development of safety and accident prevention generally. It is more than just a cosmetic credo for external consumption. Besides, by describing RoSPA's 'raison d'être' succinctly to the outside world, it presents both the Society's Executive and its staff with a number of fundamental questions, including:

- how are accidents caused?;
- how are they prevented?;
- what are the essential social, political, legal, economic and technical ingredients of accident prevention?;
- how does RoSPA intervene to influence those ingredients and the way they interact?; and
- how does it make that influence powerful?

In short, it challenges the whole Society to have a good basic understanding, of what needs to be done to improve safety in all the risk areas which the Society currently addresses - namely work, home, product, road, water, leisure and safety education.

RoSPA, for the most part, is not externally funded and in recent years, its primary focus has remained fixed, of necessity, on generating income as a 'provider'.

While it is absolutely essential that RoSPA achieves a satisfactory level of commercial performance, it is also the case that the Society cannot fulfil its charitable purposes through trading alone. (To assert that it can, might suggest some degree of confusion possibly about the nature of charities in comparison with commercial organisations and failure to understand that charities exist to help meet needs which, for whatever reason, cannot be met by market mechanisms). RoSPA is much more

than just another 'safety business'. Its business activities are not simply an 'end in themselves' but 'a means to an end', supporting an important campaigning force whose primary purpose in life is to work to make people's lives safer by securing 'safety system' change. At the same time, that campaigning role is also vital in building a vibrant image for the Society.

Because it is a relatively small (although unique and highly respected) organisation in a rapidly growing 'safety system' with many other players, it is essential that, in its 'promoting' role, RoSPA focuses on major aspects of accident prevention, where success is most likely and there are the best prospects for securing significant improvement. Over the last three years the Society's Safety Policy Division has been moving towards the development of a 'key issues' approach, using the following criteria to help decide what RoSPA is going to focus on (and, by implication, what it is not going to do):

- inherent seriousness of issues (numbers of injuries, potential for improving prevention);
- possibility of securing significant change (politics, opportunities, structures, law, technology);
- avoidance of duplication of effort by others;
- possibility of co-operation (can RoSPA find partners?);
- resourcing (can RoSPA fund the project or secure funding support?); and
- impact on future development (in terms of publicity, creating and selling products and helping to develop RoSPA staff).

Identifying candidate 'key issues' which can be screened against these criteria presupposes that the Society has a good 'map' or overview of the 'safety system' in the various areas of safety which it addresses, including accident trends, law, key players and processes, research findings, public and political concern, international developments and so on. Selecting the right 'key issues' is not easy (there are literally hundreds of possible issues in each area). Examples of issues selected on this basis since 1995 include:

- health and safety advice for small firms;
- coverage of health and safety by business schools;
- managing occupational road risk; and
- strengthening accident investigation.

Techniques applied in pursuing them have included: research (often 'quick and dirty') to give RoSPA ownership of unique pieces of knowledge; convening discussions between 'key players'; and mounting demonstration and pilot projects. Outputs include: reports and recommendations, publicity, guidance and services; media interventions; representations to political and policy making bodies etc.

Finding the right way to tackle each 'key issue' is not easy either. Potentially there is always a tension between the 'real' (serious, strategic) questions and the 'sexy' (usually hazard focused, popular) issues, the latter always being more appealing to the media. Measuring impact is even harder. Timescales can be quite long and change can be influenced by many players. Inevitably resources available for campaigning and policy work are limited.

While not retreating into an 'ivory tower', the Society is anxious to show senior policy makers, developers and influencers in particular, that, as well as being a supplier of quality products and services, it is also a prime source of new thinking and new policies on safety and accident prevention.

February 2001

'Matters of principle..'

RoSPA's mission is 'to enhance the quality of life by exercising a powerful influence for accident prevention'. ('Accidents' here also encompasses 'ill health'). It seeks to deliver against this mission as an OS&H 'promoter', for example by working on 'key issue' policy projects and commending good practice, and by being an effective 'provider' of safety products and services.

To enable it to become more influential, RoSPA wishes to expand its 'occupational' membership, particularly by securing the involvement and support of more OS&H 'high performers' in its policy development and influencing work. It also wants more such organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors to have access to the OS&H services and support which it can provide.

A further broad objective in expanding the number of occupational members in the RoSPA 'family' is to build up and make more visible a core of organisations whose commitment to OS&H and levels of performance can be commended to others (for example, in line with the 'best practice' philosophy now being advanced in the Government's and the Health and Safety Commission's plans for 'Revitalising' H&S). That commitment, RoSPA believes, could usefully be expressed as a set of RoSPA 'Principles' which all its occupational safety members could be invited to endorse.

A very great deal has been written on the subject of occupational health and safety and in particular on OS&H management and culture. Nevertheless RoSPA believes that there could be considerable merit in seeking to condense widely accepted, fundamental points into a set of general propositions not simply as goals which members share but as a useful and succinct memorandum to remind their own employees and other stakeholders of the importance of OS&H.

One option for example might be for the most senior executive of a RoSPA member organisation to sign the 'Principles', expressing their organisation's support for them and to display this alongside their RoSPA membership certificate and/or to include copies in internal communications.

The following ten point draft has been prepared as a basis for initial discussion. It is essentially a blend of key points embedded in documents such as HSG65 and BS8800, but with particular emphases which reflect RoSPA views on best practice.

The RoSPA 'Principles'

"All work organisations should:

1. clearly acknowledge the prevention of harm to all people exposed to work related risks as an overriding priority;
2. seek to achieve this by establishing an effective health and safety management system underpinned by committed senior leadership, effective management and meaningful workforce involvement and ensuring appropriate consideration of the health and safety implications of all decisions;

3. ensure that their management system includes: clear policies and objectives, effective organisation to achieve them, integration of H&S into all planning processes, performance monitoring, periodic review, audit and feedback; to achieve continuous improvement and is supported by adequate resources;
4. ensure that every person in the organisation is competent to carry out their role safely and is held clearly accountable for doing so;
5. not permit any activity to be undertaken without suitable and sufficient risk assessment to establish the nature and level of any risk control measures required;
6. ensure that risk control measures always meet best practice standards and are fully implemented;
7. establish clear, evidenced based health and safety improvement targets, celebrate success in their achievement and report periodically on their corporate health and safety performance to stakeholders;
8. ensure that all accidents, incidents and cases of work related ill health are reported and investigated appropriately to ensure that lessons are learned and acted on;
9. seek to exercise a positive influence on the health and safety standards of all other organisations and individuals with which they come into contact; and
10. develop a strong health and safety culture characterised by a shared understanding at all levels in the organisation of the moral and business case for health and safety and a shared commitment to the enhancement of the prevention of accidents and health damage and the promotion of health and well being."

Issues

There are two main challenges in drafting the 'Principles' - with a certain tension between them: 1) conceptual, capturing the essence of excellence in OS&H management; and 2) presentational, communicating these ideas in a way which will have meaning for intended audiences. In theory, clarity on 1 should help in achieving concision on 2. Tackled the other way around there is a distinct danger of simply producing bland formulations with no underpinning rigour. The practical test to be met however is the degree of comprehension which could be achieved in the course of a three minute read by an average person standing in an entrance lobby to a company where the statement might be displayed.

Views are thus sought specifically on: the overall value of the proposal; its general credibility; alternative ways of communicating the essence of OS&H management and culture; fundamental points which should be covered; and those points which would be most helpful in prompting employees and other stakeholders to reflect on their contribution to achieving performance improvement.

Way forward

Readers' views will be passed on to RoSPA's National Occupational Safety & Health Committee who will be asked for advice on the final form of the 'Principles'. RoSPA will then promote them as a consensus 'best practice' statement and highlight them in its membership work.

Comments should be sent to Roger Bibbings RoSPA Occupational Safety Adviser at RoSPA; e-mail: rbibbings@rospa.co.uk

February 2003**United concerns**

The fact that there was no mention of a new offence of corporate killing in the Queen's Speech last November has led to a speculation in the media and elsewhere that this much heralded measure has now been dropped from the Government's agenda.

Press reports and media speculation of course are not uncommon, particularly about what governments intend to include in their legislative programmes. On this occasion however, given the need to keep this issue in focus and to highlight the cause of OS&H generally, RoSPA, together with the British Safety Council and the IOSH wrote to Home Secretary, David Blunkett, just before the Queen's Speech pressing the case for the new offence to be introduced as soon as possible.

They emphasised that, as three leading organisations in the UK they have been working closely in partnership with the HSC/E to help deliver the targets set out in '*Revitalising Health and Safety*' (RHS) and the linked programme for health at work, '*Securing Health Together*' (SH2). Indeed, they had already written to the Prime Minister when a 'home' for the HSC was under discussion earlier in the year.

RoSPA, IOSH and BSC are particularly concerned that speculation that corporate killing has been dropped will send the wrong signal, especially to those organisations that are still adopting a dangerously lax approach to health and safety management. At the same time, they have emphasised to Mr Blunkett that they are not interested in seeing 'corporate killing' enacted for its own sake. All three organisations share a very clear view that tougher enforcement is only part of a much bigger and more complex set of ingredients needed to deliver better safety at work. (RoSPA feels, for example, that the Government should continue to examine the idea of remedial sentencing in health and safety cases, in line with 'Action Point' nine in RHS).

Like the OS&H community in general, given the lessons of the major disasters of the eighties and nineties, they were strongly encouraged by the commitment given by the Government in October 1997 to reform the law of involuntary manslaughter. The collapse, for example, of the prosecution of P&O following the Zeebrugge disaster showed the weakness of the current law in bringing to account a company which was found by the subsequent public enquiry to have been infected by 'a culture of sloppiness' from top to bottom.

After a long period of debate and consultation on the Law Commission's report on this issue, a clear consensus has now emerged that a new offence is required to ensure that organisations can be prosecuted following work-related deaths due to corporate conduct which falls 'far below that which could be reasonably expected'. It has now been agreed that directors will not be included within scope of the new offence but will remain liable to prosecution in such cases under sections 36 and 37 of the HSW Act.

Although the new offence would not introduce any new substantive duties on employers, it is understood that the Home Office (which is leading on proposals) is nevertheless conducting a routine Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) to gauge

reaction to the proposal from businesses and other stakeholders. RIAs are usually designed to assess the likely effect of any new measure, for example, in this case whether perceptions of enhanced corporate liability following work related deaths could adversely affect future investment decisions.)

It is likely that progress to date with the RIA has not enabled Ministers to make an explicit commitment to introduce a new offence in the near future. RoSPA, BSC and IOSH however have sought an assurance from David Blunkett that the Government remains committed to the early introduction of 'corporate killing' and have urged him to press ahead with it as soon as possible.

RoSPA, IOSH, the BSC and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health have also written recently to health and safety minister. Nick Brown, calling for a major independent review of health and safety training. They have stressed that, despite everything that has been achieved in making workplaces safer and healthier there is still much to be done to ensure that the aims of the 1974 HSW Act are made a reality.

Over the last few years the Employment Training Organisation and other 'key players' in OS&H have been working hard to help define standards of H&S competence and new standards were launched in August. While RHS has recognised this work, it has singularly failed to look at the extent to which H&S training is actually being delivered.

What RoSPA, IOSH, BSC and CIEH are saying to Nick Brown is that, if the targets in RHS are to be met, then there has to be a much more energetic approach across the UK to securing effective promotion and delivery of health and safety training. The focus in RHS on embedding coverage of safety and risk concepts in the National Curriculum and in the training of safety significant professionals is clearly the right way forward in the long term but the really pressing need is to ensure that every employee has undergone health and safety training appropriate to their role. While '*Revitalising*' has focused usefully on how to mobilise a whole range of 'drivers' to help motivate businesses to improve their approach to H&S, thus far it has failed to address the extent of unmet H&S training needs and the adequacy of delivery.

Particular areas where there is need for further work include health and safety training for small firms, specific H&S skills training and training for senior and line managers.

H&S training is at the heart of what RoSPA, BSC, IOSH and CIEH are all about. They have said that they want to explore with the minister and his HSC/E colleagues how a major joint review in this field could be set up, under an independent chair, with a view to gathering data, identifying priorities and agreeing ways forward.



Parting Shots

How many lives saved?

► **There is no doubt** that the safety community saves lives and enables those who would otherwise have been blighted by injury to live normally. But how do we know how many lives have been saved? asks RoSPA's occupational safety adviser, **Roger Bibbings**.

RoSPA's mission is 'to save lives and reduce injuries'. We work hard everyday to help improve safety and accident prevention: at work, on the road, in the home, in water and leisure activities, and we work to help improve safety and risk education.

RoSPA is both a safety campaigner, seeking to highlight issues and secure change, and a safety deliverer, providing solutions to those directly at risk or equipping others with the skills and knowledge they need to help deliver safety.

With more public scepticism about the case for safety and a sense that the safety community are 'nannying' the public and restricting organisational and personal freedom, it becomes all the more important for us to demonstrate our value and impact.

There is absolutely no doubt that the safety community saves lives and enables those who would otherwise have been blighted by injury to live normally. Yet in contrast to the heroic life saving work of the emergency and medical services who are concerned with tertiary safety (dealing with the aftermath of

accidents), the quiet work of safety bodies who are concerned mainly with primary and secondary safety (stopping accidents and protecting people from their consequences if they do occur) receives much less attention. The reality, however, is that this work is responsible for many, many more lives saved. Countless thousands – tens or hundreds of thousands, millions even – are alive because of the impact of accident prevention. We, nor indeed they – for the most part – know who they are, but they are out there.

So exactly how many people's lives have been saved by the work of the safety and accident prevention community? And of those lives saved how many owe their continued existence exclusively or mainly to our work. We need to know in order to have some sense of our impact.

The notion of a live saved itself is difficult. We must all die. The question is how soon? So strictly speaking we are talking about life/years saved and the prevention of early death.

In occupational safety, RIDDOR notifiable fatal injuries to workers are at all time low –

less than 200 per annum and these are heavily concentrated in two sectors, construction and agriculture. However, this figure excludes work-related maritime and air fatalities and fatal work-related road injury. If the latter were included, it would bring the figure to over 1,000 deaths a year – but this is less than a sixth of those who are thought to die prematurely as a result of health damage (cancer, lung disease etc) due to past exposures to hazardous agents in the workplace. And these deaths are not all due to working conditions which no longer exist. In many workplaces potentially life limiting exposures continue to be inadequately controlled.

What we do know is that occupational mortality, from both work-related accidents and diseases, has continued to fall. Consider that, in 1916, at the height of the First World War, there were over 1,500 fatal injuries in factories alone, not to mention the carnage in mines and shipbuilding due to unsafe working conditions which were the norm at that time. Although we still have numerous safety problems to solve, there can be no doubt that Britain is now a much safer place



Parting Shots

that it was in the first half of the last century.

Consider also road safety. In the early 1930s, before the introduction of the driving test and when traffic volumes were a tiny fraction of what they are today, over 8,000 people died annually on our roads. In 2008/9 the figure was just over 2,500.

But working out how many lives (or life/years) have been saved by accident prevention work is not easy. One fairly crude epidemiological approach might involve making some projections based on aggregation of the difference between fatal injuries observed in a given period (say a decade) and those expected at the rate prevalent in the similar previous period. But there would be many confounding factors, not least changes in exposures, behaviours and technologies.

HSE, for example, often claims that all of the major reduction which has occurred in fatal injury since 1974 is proof of the success of the Health and Safety at Work Act. But in more considered discussion it will admit that much of this reduction has been due to changes in the 'hazard burden', for example as the UK has de-industrialised and the hazards associated with extractive and heavy industry have effectively been transferred overseas.

Safety management

Yet it is clear that better health and safety management has played – and continues to play – a big part. Witness the significant reductions in fatal and serious injuries that have occurred in those hazardous sectors that set injury targets in the wake of '*Revitalising Health and Safety*' in 2000.

An even cruder approach to assessing lives saved is to compare our fatal injury rates in the UK with those of our EU partners. Britain for example has an overall fatal accident (all causes) rate five times lower than Lithuania. It could be argued that if we relaxed our safety efforts to their level we might be killing at least another 40,000 people per year!

Looked at in wider terms, however, there is an argument to say that 'observed over expected' is too narrow a methodology. Many lives have been saved in the UK, for example, by the prevention of major disasters which have never been allowed to occur. Twenty-five years on from Bhopal, the world's worst industrial disaster, in which over 8,000 died and the health of tens of thousands was permanently damaged, we should not forget that the only reason that such tragedies have never unfolded here, for example on Merseyside or Teesside, is because of the world

leading approach which the UK has developed to major hazards safety. The same is true of the nuclear sector.

In an even broader sense, there are literally millions of citizens who can say that they came within a hair's breadth of death but for the exercise of some elementary safety discipline which they learned at school such as the kerb drill (introduced originally by RoSPA) or restraint in a vehicle collision due to a seat-belt (introduced as a statutory requirement as a result of RoSPA's campaigning).

In a sense we all – virtually without exception – owe our lives to the safety and accident prevention community. After all, things tend to go right by design rather than just by accident (although sadly the contrary is more often the case; often disasters narrowly fail to convert to harm just because of the operation of pure chance).

Much as some people may be tempted to agree with those who say that safety is a waste of time, on reflection we have to accept that every time we get into an aircraft, or travel on the railways or on the highway network, the hidden hand of safety is hard at work keeping us from death's door.

The nagging question for organisations such as RoSPA – or for each one of us as safety professionals is – how many lives did we actually save? As a paramedic or a firefighter – or even an A&E surgeon – we might, after a lifetime's work, have some sense of the number of people whose lives we had saved. But for prevention professionals, even a rough and ready answer is almost impossible to guess. Quite apart from the methodological problems in attempting a calculation, there is the near impossibility of being able to disentangle our specific contributions from

those of all the others who have helped to deliver a safe system of work or a safe product etc.

Safety impact is not just measured in terms of 'outcomes' (lives saved) but 'inputs' (such as education, organisation) and 'outputs' (control measures), and above all it is a team effort involving, for example, employers, regulators, unions, scientists, and of course campaigners and service providers like RoSPA.

Impact

Of course, there are star players – such as the great pioneers in safety, whether one thinks of Humphry Davy and the miners' safety lamp or Percy Shaw who invented cat's eyes, or the countless others who have been responsible for groundbreaking safety innovation or the introduction of specific measures.

Over the ninety-two years of its life, RoSPA has, without doubt, been one of those star players – and in so many fields of safety. Indeed it was RoSPA's work which stimulated the development of the mature safety regimes we have today – at work and on the road particularly – but whose impact is too often taken for granted.

But there are still millions of lives to be saved from the scourge of accidents, not just in Britain but especially in low and middle income countries. Knowing where one has been able to save the most lives in the past is surely a key consideration in deciding where to focus one's limited resources in the future.

Readers' views welcome.

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24/7 safety

► **With employees suffering four to five times more A&E level injury outside working time, there is a compelling business case for trying to help them stay safe when they are not at work, says RoSPA occupational safety adviser *Roger Bibbings*.**

Have we really thought hard enough about applying basic ideas about workplace safety to other settings? Have we thought enough, for example, about developing an equivalent of a simple tool such as the HSE's *Five steps to risk assessment* to help people develop a more systematic approach to hazard identification and risk management in their own homes?

At first sight this might seem a bit contrived – far-fetched even – but if we consider parents as risk managers in the home, could we not think about transferring the essence of workplace safety risk management into the home environment? After all, many people who learn about health and safety risk management at work will already be attuned to this sort of approach. And what people learn at work they tend to take home! Look at IT training at work, for example, and the way it has helped to facilitate the massive growth in computer use at home.

And is it not the case that the 'Plan, Do, Check, Act', mantra now embedded in HSE's new *Managing for health and safety* guidance has a much wider resonance and is relevant when it comes to doing anything safely and reliably?

Essentially there are two parts to workplace health and safety management: (1) getting the right system (policy, people, procedures/

processes) in place; and (2) identifying the hazards, assessing the risks and selecting and applying the right control measures. If you don't have 1 in place, 2 doesn't really work!

Work safety depends on commitment and leadership as well as on participation and it needs to be underpinned by knowledge and expertise. And 'systems' need to be backed by 'culture' (*'the way we do things round here'*) to make them work in practice and to help fill in the gaps. There needs to be a shared sense of safety priorities so everyone is focused on the main threats. In essence, isn't this exactly what is required for home safety too?

For example, using available data on home injury, how can we help people to 'risk profile' their homes in the same way as we encourage businesses to focus on their most likely sources of harm? Of course, things will vary according to the design of the home, its occupants and the various activities taking place in the home environment. Nevertheless it ought to be possible from analysis of injury to suggest some order of priority.

For example, from a US home safety website, their top five kinds of home accidents are listed as (highest first): falls; poisonings; fires; suffocation and choking; and drowning.

An Australian site suggests that the top six most common home accidents 'down under' are: cutting yourself with a knife; slamming

fingers in doors/windows; falling down the stairs; getting burned while cooking; falling out of windows; and electrocution.

The home safety pages of the RoSPA website focus on: fire safety; electrical safety; heating and cooking; safety glass; safety with medicines and cleaners; and DIY and garden safety. We also have lots of useful advice about home hazards such as blind cords, and nappy sacks, falls prevention and so on (visit www.rospace.com/homesafety).

Perhaps there already is something out there equivalent to "How to risk assess your home" – an app perhaps? Or perhaps there is already something like "How to become safer by looking more closely at accidents in your home"? I notice that the Electrical Safety Council, for example, has produced an app on electrical hazards in the home – see www.esc.org.uk/public/safety-in-the-home/home-safety-app

At first glance it might seem that, by its very nature, the home is an informal, semi-chaotic environment where the ideas about order and systems that have been developed, mainly in large workplaces (and are underpinned by regulation) just do not fit. But is this really the case?

'A place for everything and everything in its place' is a mantra advanced in 'lean manufacturing doctrines' like Six Sigma. But isn't this actually the dream of every



Parting Shots

harassed mother or father who cannot understand why their efforts to get household objects restored to their rightful place are constantly frustrated by their children who have other quite different agendas? But like the change management specialist, study those agendas and behaviours more closely and it may be possible to find safe house-keeping solutions that are more likely to be observed by these currently non-compliant members of the household.

Even simple techniques such as 'positive safety conversations' developed by behavioural safety specialists might have something to teach us about how to engage children or older people who may be resistant to taking on board essential home safety messages.

And any family activity, be it an outing in the countryside, a barbecue or a fireworks party, should be preceded by a 'safety huddle'. After all, involving children in deciding just how safe things need to be (*'only as safe as necessary'*) will surely help them eventually to understand that safety is all about good judgement and not simply about following rules (to be broken as soon as backs are turned!).

Of course models and theories are fine. And in any human endeavour, using abstract ideas about risk management to try to get a better handle on what is really going on and how to make things safer is absolutely essential. But they are no substitute for careful and open investigation of real phenomena – in the case of safety, why things actually go wrong in the real world and conversely (but mainly neglected) why things actually go right most of the time.

More in-depth investigation of home accidents using structured methods such as ECFA (Events and Conditional Factors Analysis) is long overdue to assess the scope for dealing, not just with immediate causation but underlying conditional factors. And more observational studies are probably needed of homes and families which seem, on the face of things, to have got a good handle on safety – particularly families that are socially disadvantaged. How and why have they achieved this, apparently against the odds? What lessons are there that might be learned on how to facilitate similar results elsewhere?

There can be no doubt, the well run workplace is a great school for safety generally. So could it be that in safer families, bread winners are actually taking safety attitudes, skills and knowledge home from the workplace to help them make safer choices for themselves and their families 24/7?

In my opinion safety professionals have a very annoying habit of dividing the world up

into different domains in which they seek to develop their own unique approaches to safety and reliability. And working in these silos (for example, workplace, aviation, clinical, personal safety and so on) they tend to believe that their particular problems are unique and that the approaches they take to tackling risk are 'domain specific' and not transferable to quite different settings. Sometimes this is true but generally speaking it is not. Safety specialists' assumptions about the uniqueness of their safety doctrines tend to arise simply from the fact that they have never had to apply themselves to preventing accidents in other areas.

The knowledge developed about 'human factors' in work-related accidents, such as in offshore, rail, marine and aviation operations, has made a massive contribution to achieving better clinical safety in the NHS. Has it not also got a massive contribution to make to tackling the scourge of home accidents which annually account for nearly 14,000 deaths a year and over three million A&E visits to our massively overworked hospitals? Technical understanding about how to reduce slip and trip accidents in workplaces and public space has clearly got a lot to contribute to prevention of falls in the home. Gravity and bipedalism are part of the human condition!

But safety knowledge transfer is not simply a one-way street in which thinking flows from the workplace to the home. The great William G Johnson, for example, who in the 1970s developed MORT (Management Oversight and Risk Tree), a powerful approach that has been widely adopted and adapted to better understand accidents in high hazard settings, actually started out by investigating home accidents.

Last month Professor Richard Parish, ex CEO of the Royal Society of Public Health and adviser to Public Health England, delivered the 2013 Alan St John Holt Memorial Lecture

in Birmingham. He challenged occupational health and safety professionals to think more creatively about how to extend their influence beyond the workplace (for example, through 24/7 safety programmes) and how to enhance corporate safety outreach to the community generally (for example, through greater sponsorship of LASER programmes – see www.lasersafety.org.uk). (I'm constantly surprised at how many OSH professionals have still not heard of LASER!)

Of course, many safety professionals already feel they have their work cut out just dealing with what happens inside the workplace but with employees suffering four to five times more A&E level injury outside working time, there is a compelling business case for trying to help them stay safe when they are not at work. Also, injury to family members also results in people taking time off.

So, while it might not seem like an obvious part of the occupational safety adviser's day job, inviting home safety specialists into workplaces to talk to young parents (people at work are a captive audience) ought to be much higher up his or her 'to do' list. (They should also consider inviting in other educators such as those dealing with fire safety, safer motorcycling and so on). Again, if handled correctly, it will not be a one-way street. The benefits are likely to be mutual because, while they are delivering their safety messages in a workplace setting, home and other topic safety experts could also learn a lot by immersing themselves in the safety philosophy and practices that are to be found inside organisations, particularly the higher performing ones that are likely to be imaginative enough to stretch the workplace safety agenda in this way.

Comments are invited.

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