

Turning research into reality - How we can deliver on prevention

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Trades Union Congress (UK)
October 2014

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Occupational diseases

- Have decades of high quality research on the levels and causes.
- Also thousands of pages of examples of good effective actions.
- We know the problems and we know the solutions.
- Need the Commission to put the two together.
- We need a response based on the evidence – not political expediency or deregulatory dogma about “burdens”.

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Scale of the problem in EU

- Fatalities 2,500 a year (+1,200 RTAs)
- Workplace cancer deaths 104,000 plus 37,500 workplace COPD deaths.
- 159,500 deaths from occupational illness, excludes deaths while driving when working and CV deaths caused by stress.
- Occupational MSDs effect 44 million people and makes up 50% of all work-related health problems and 39% of all sickness absence.
- A further 19% of sickness absence is down to work-related stress
Work related stress is experienced by 22% of working Europeans
- (Growing evidence of synergy between the 2).

Problem not « historical »

- Exposure today is different but not necessarily less.
- New risks include diesel exhaust
- Increasing shift work among women
- Increased exposure to wood dust
- Greater job insecurity and less control.

Solution?

- Key is prevention
- Need simple regulation with proper enforcement.

The Commission response

- REFIT announced - Dropped new directives on carcinogens or MSDs
- No directive on stress.
- Considering reduced protection for those working in SMEs by reducing risk assessment requirements.
- Emphasis on “reducing burden on low risk” by removing risk assessment requirements.

The low risk/SME fallacy

- Reality of “low risk”. Commission talks of offices shops and schools.
- 58% of work-related sickness absence due to stress and MSDs.
- Yet agency figures show:
 - Stress highest in education, health and public administration
 - Highest number of work-related MSD complaints in service working and shop and sales workers
- Also SMEs employ 66% of workforce but are responsible for 82% of injuries and 90% of fatalities.

What unions want

- Unions frustrated by the lack of action.
- The Commission must act on the evidence!
- Framework directive shows that good clear regulation works.
- Clear that the problems making people ill or killing them are carcinogens, MSDs and stress. We need directives on these.
- Must be a proper enforcement strategy
- No two tier protection - Workers in SMEs and so-called “low-risk” enterprises need equal protection.