

ORR occupational health programme update

for rail dutyholders

December 2011

This quarterly brief aims to bring you up to date on progress with some of the activities in the ORR [Occupational Health programme 2010-14](#), to help inform discussions on health at routine liaison meetings with ORR inspectors. We have identified key messages for rail dutyholders, and would welcome feedback. This issue focuses on:

- Improved leadership and co-operation on health across the rail industry
- Scope for more effective management of work related stress by rail companies

1. Industry leadership and co-operation on health

There is encouraging evidence that the industry is now gearing up to provide stronger leadership and extend co-operative working on occupational health (OH), both at a strategic and tactical level. Recent developments include the approval by RSSB's Board, with support from Railway Group members, of a wider RSSB remit on OH in areas where it can add value. Initial work is likely to focus on developing the industry's intelligence base by agreeing common OH data; sharing of good practice across industry; and provision/signposting to tools to support more robust OH risk assessment, e.g. on COSHH assessments. Plans for a cross industry OH steering group are being explored. Both these areas align closely with the priorities identified in ORR's OH programme and the findings of our 2010 baseline review of the industry's OH management.

On a tactical level, co-operative working on health (and safety) is exemplified by inclusion of LUL on the mainline Infrastructure Safety Liaison Group (ISLG) which represents NR and its contractors. Following recent interventions by ORR on silica dust in ballast handling, ISLG has endorsed a cross industry working group led by NR National Delivery Service (NDS) set up to explore technical and operational solutions to reducing exposures to respirable crystalline silica (RCS) at all stages in the ballast supply chain, from the quarry to the worksite. Work is also proposed to help improve the quality of COSHH assessments for RCS exposures by agreeing 'template', task based risk assessments for ballast handling, informed by representative air sampling results, potentially to be used by all companies in the supply chain, from quarries, local distribution centres, NR/NDS, hauliers/FOCs, and contractors. To facilitate this work, compilation of a shared secure database of (anonymised) air sampling results for various ballast handling operations is being

explored. As a result of their increased focus on health, as from September 2011 this external industry OH update will be sent direct to RSSB and ISLG members.

Key messages:

- **Railway Group members should note the work planned by RSSB to agree common OH incidence data. Are you able to actively support this work**

and/or are you developing your own arrangements for measuring and costing absences due to work related ill health? Is there scope for sharing data collection methods and analysis, for example within the Railway Group or with other companies within your parent group?

- **All duty holders are encouraged to voluntarily report to ORR on an annual basis against the baseline OH indicators we identified in our baseline survey. Details of the OH measures we are seeking feedback on can be found on our [website](#).**
- **If your company is involved in ballast transport and handling, are you aware of the cross industry NDS-led working group on silica in ballast dust? Do you have a mechanism to input to the group and capture good practice from it? ORR inspectors will be seeking assurance that adequate arrangements are in place to manage exposures to silica in ballast dust. As well as NDS and NR renewals contractors, this may also be relevant to freight operators; NR maintenance delivery units, and LUL in-house maintenance teams, involved in CAPEX work; and some larger heritage operators.**

2. ORR seeks improvements in management of work related stress

Stress is already well recognised by rail employers and trades unions as a key health concern within the industry, with significant costs to individuals and businesses. We know that many rail companies have effective arrangements in place to manage stress at an individual level after traumatic events (such as fatalities, assault, or SPADs), have happened, and to support affected individuals back into work. Personal stress resilience training and counselling support are an extremely useful part of an overall stress management strategy. However, if companies only focus on tackling the problem at an individual level, after the harm has occurred, the root causes of stress may not be identified and managed effectively.

ORR is seeking a shift in approach from rail employers, with less dependence on reactive management of stress at an individual level (although this will still clearly be needed for affected individuals) and more proactive management of stress by looking at job design and the organisation as a whole, for example by use of a step by step risk assessment process such as the [HSE Management Standards approach](#)¹. This preventive, organisational approach will help companies to minimise harm to individuals' health, maximise business benefits, and help meet their legal duties.

Managers can play a vital role in proactively managing stress, as they are likely to see first hand the problems which cause stress in their teams; influence job design

¹<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm>

and work allocation; will often be the first point of contact for an individual feeling stressed; and are a vital communication link between senior managers and their team. Recognising and developing the positive skills and behaviours to manage their staff in ways that minimise work-related stress is important for managers. A competency framework specifically designed to help managers to assess and improve their skills and behaviours in managing stress has been developed by HSE in conjunction with CIPD and Investors in People. This HSE [stress management competency framework](#) supports the HSE Management Standards approach and can

be used to help integrate positive behaviours for stress management into a company's existing performance management and development arrangements.

As part of our health programme 2010-14, ORR will continue to work to promote the benefits of an organisational approach to stress management directly with rail industry groups, individual businesses, and trade unions, and also via our website and the rail press. We will actively support those companies who adopt or develop an organisational approach to stress management, such as the HSE Management Standards, and encourage them to act as exemplars for the rest of the industry. Many sectors appear to be ahead of the rail industry and as a result much useful guidance on what really works is already available – the [Mindful Employer initiative](#) for example is a nationwide, voluntary network for employers providing extensive guidance and practical support on mental health in the workplace.

Key messages:

- **Dutyholders should be aware of ORR's ongoing work to promote the wider adoption of an organisational, preventive approach to stress management within the rail industry, for example using the HSE management standards approach and the HSE stress management competency framework. [ORR's web page](#) on work related stress contains more information and sources of advice.**
- **Do you know what work related stress actually costs your business and how you might reduce these losses? If you want to learn more, consult relevant [research](#)² on costs to business of work related stress and the [business case](#) for managing work related stress effectively.**
- **Are your current stress management arrangements adequate and effective? Do they focus solely on responding to stress at an individual level, or could they do more to identify and tackle the root causes of work related stress in a systematic way before the harm occurs? Are you familiar with the HSE Management Standards (MS) approach and the HSE stress management competency framework?**
- **ORR invites companies who are keen to adopt the MS approach to act as exemplars for the rest of the industry. We are willing to support such companies and can offer to help them understand, for example by a presentation to senior managers, what benefits this approach can bring and what it involves.**

² The Centre for Mental Health: Developing the business case December 2007

- Rail dutyholders should note the comprehensive advice and practical support available to employers on mental health in the workplace through the [Mindful Employer initiative](#)