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Health and Safety *Fighting for our rights – and our lives*

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You couldn't make it up.....

David Cameron on the English riots

As we consider these questions of attitude and behaviour, the signals that government sends, and the incentives it creates...

The truth is, the interpretation of human rights legislation has exerted a chilling effect on public sector organisations, leading them to act in ways that fly in the face of common sense, offend our sense of right and wrong, and undermine responsibility.

It is exactly the same with health and safety – where regulations have often been twisted out of all recognition into a culture where the words 'health and safety' are lazily trotted out to justify all sorts of actions and regulations that damage our social fabric.

So I want to make something very clear: I get it. This stuff matters. And as we urgently review the work we're doing on the broken society, judging whether it's ambitious enough - I want to make it clear that there will be no holds barred...

...and that most definitely includes the human rights and health and safety culture.

Scale of the problem

- Health and Safety as big a problem today as ever.
- Over 20,000 people killed prematurely every year
- 2.1 million suffer a work-related health problem.
- All the evidence is that this can only be reduced by strong regulation supported by good regulation and guidance.



Government response - General

- Coalition agreement – one mention of safety (on policing)
- Various general points on regulation

Since then -

- Set up Young Review
- HSE budget cut by 35% over 3 years
- Red Tape challenge
- March 2011 – New strategy which covered enforcement, charging and a further review.

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Government response

What does it mean in practice?

- Regulation
- Enforcement
- Support and Guidance
- Occupational health

Regulation

- No new regulation unless from Europe
- No “gold plating”
- “One in one out”
- “Sunset clauses”
- No new “burdens” on small businesses (less than 10 employees) for 3 years
- Review of existing regulation (Young Review & Losftedt review)
- “Red tape challenge”.
- Change to RIDDOR regulations
- Alternatives to regulation (responsibility pledges).

Enforcement

- Inspections to be reduced further by the cuts.
- No proactive inspections of “low risk premises” – this will reduce proactive inspections by a third.
- Introduce a charge for all inspectors/HSE work from when “fault” is found



Support and Guidance

- Close HSE Infoline
- No new publicity campaigns, and those planned have been stopped.
- Revise all guidance
- Promoting “on-line” assessments



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Governments Occupational health agenda

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WHY????

- Reduction in regulation, enforcement and guidance is NOT because of the cuts. It is a deliberate government attack.
- Pro business agenda
- Anti-regulation anti-Europe views
- Health and safety is an easy target
- Part of a wider attack on workers rights
- Government wants a low wage, "flexible" workforce.

Consequences

- No new regulations on director's duties, temperature or safety representatives.
- Fall in enforcement will mean increase in deaths, injuries and illness.
- HSE stated "the expected 'lower level of enforcement' would mean 'a consequent decrease in health and safety standards throughout Great Britain, with ensuing costs to society.'"

Fighting Back

- This is a political attack on workers rights
- Produced “The case for health and safety” and supporting poster.
- TUC organised a day of action on health and safety in October last year and a march on the cuts this year.
- Union co-ordinated lobby of parliament
- Various briefings for affiliates and MPs.
- Worked with MPs on debates and questions
- Used Workers Memorial Day to raise the issue.

Fighting Back

- Campaign must be local as well as national
- Need to take the arguments into the workplace
- Show the effects of Government action
- Safety representatives cannot replace HSE/LA inspectors, but can report issues
- Make the link with other attacks on workers rights and the cuts
- Work with Trades Councils and local campaign groups
- Lobby local MPs and councillors
- Support any further action/demonstrations on the cuts or employment rights