**Notes/Unison Scotland Health & Safety Seminar 22 October 2021 by T Hill**

**National H & S Update**

**Training**- Online training for 109 new safety reps across UK . Branches and Regions to continue recruitment for new safety reps who will be trained to develop skills and experience

**HSE Statistics 2020 /2021** - Will not available until December 2021. Once announced SD will circulate to reps for information. Main Safety Topics being reported are Stress, Violence and other unsafe working environments Forum shown short presentation video highlighting top 10 employers who have been prosecuted due to violations and unsafe working practices.

**Gemma Sewell (Parents United UK)- Presentation**

Gave detailed report back on work network have been campaigning on in relation to workplace ventilation within schools, airborne transmission, lack of face covering/masks and installation of plex glass. Discussion took place regarding various ventilation options i.e. windows/trickle vents to allow more air circulation but still maintain thermal comfort within room/space. NDIR CO2 monitors (800 ppm provides good valid reading relating to ventilation levels and measures the breathable air in location. Due to high costs for mechanical systems many companies are using other methods

**Air Cleaning Technical systems** if ventilation is poor could be MERV Filters, UVC or other portable options. Further guidance can be found CIBSE/HSE

**Risk assessments** conducted by companies by competent and trained safety practioner who also has skills and experience in ventilation field is vitally important.

Forum expressed concern that this is no b Lack of legal requirement to have mechanical systems fitted and this needs to be address due to current and future covid implications.

Future aim of group raise awareness and pursue more ventilation in all public buildings, improved performance, safety and efficiency testing’s, full documentation and certification with regular maintenance and monitoring to ensure maximum ventilation/air circulation is achieved.

**Connor Walker (Long Covid Action Scotland) plus Facebook long covid dedicated page**

Personally has had long covid for 20 months, prior to infection was healthy and active in many sports and physical activities. However now has extreme fatigue, has had to greatly reduce his hours at work and his recovery periods to rest are becoming more frequent. Now dependent on more assistance from others. It is expected that this will be similar experience that others with long covid have /will rely on in varying degrees in the future.

Reported increase of infection within children who may develop long covid implications at later date, continues to work. with researchers and various steering groups to share/collate information that be useful to assist long term with long covid sufferers. Health Care providers still not fully aware of every way this condition can impact on individuals. Many symptoms identified so far include autoimmune disease, organ/live damage, respiratory and chest inflammation.

Both employers and health care need to listen to employees as they are the only ones who can explain and demonstrate how long covid is affecting them both physically and mentally and that it is not restricted to only elderly but across all age groups

SD advised Unison have recently Long Covid Guidance which can be obtained from Nat Unison site.

Forum agreed profile of topic requires more awareness amongst within Political parties, employers, HSE enforcement, research and investment and more action required as more people suffer from long covid at later date. Sickness and absence rates within workplaces are expected to increase in the future, which could lead to termination of employment by many employers who don’t understand the impact on their staff health. In addition agreed that more training required for GP’s on the wide range of conditions that long covid is generating.

Branches/reps expected will also see increase in numbers by supporting more members who will be affected by long covid and employers return to their original sickness and absence policies.

**Professor Andy Waterson- Presentation**

Gave detailed report back on various research that has been done by WHO. HSE, claim they have conducted 316,000 covid spot checks but only 1 prosecution against company. Discussion around subject of temperature and phrasing within legislation that is restrictive for unions. Previous studies by fire services have indicated the impact of long distance fires but can still

Have problems on individuals with chest/asthma conditions. Additional research by EASHW (European), OSHA etc details of each also reported back to forum.

Disappointment that scottish govt and Industrial Disease have failed to acknowledge the effects of long covid.

**Jane Crawford (Thompsons)**

Reported back on number of specific cases and outcomes from Scottish Industrial Court and the particular acts of legislation used. In Scotland Personal Injury claims success rate is low at 20% for those cases who have had full hearing. Many cases are settled out of court by employers so aren’t included in formal statistics. Discussion took place on changes to legislation and becoming more challenging and difficult to prove. Now that more workers are home working this is a much wider problem than before as this working environment also has safety implications for many employees under separate legislation which also require to be fully implemented. Thompsons have seen increase in enquiries relating to mental health due to covid and change in working environments.

Reps were reminded to record all dates/contents of calls and correspondence issued to employer to collate evidence for Thompson to allow full review when assessing if claim to be pursued.

However claims on this topic may prove difficult as there is wide range of issues that can cause mental health /stress and proven to be directly linked to employer.

New challenge will be cases related to covid and the importance of statements, evidence to allow full assessment to determine if case can be pursued on behalf of member.

Thompsons have created a specific Covid team in Glasgow to deal with claims relating to covid infection but again could be difficult to provide infection within workplace and not within community or public transport etc.

Concern that many workers going into work because they can’t afford to self-isolate which increases risk of workplace covid outbreaks. HSE had been contacted by one safety rep who advised they wouldn’t investigate. Copy of correspondence from rep to be sent to SD & JC(Thompsons) to review.

HSE won’t investigate individual stress issues but may consider bullying and harassment if collective high numbers within a workplace. Again It was stressed the importance of recording, reporting, audit trail to assist with any action if HSE will pursue at later date.

**Stress & Mental Health- Presentation by SD**

SD reported on number of stats including violence for 2019/20 collated across service groups.

At end of all presentations general discussion about what safety reps can do, obtain support and raise and pursue issues with employers. Reps reported back number of local operational safety difficulties they are encountering with employers relating to recording of covid outbreaks within large organisations, increase in stress levels across all sectors due to increased workloads, longer working hours, isolation. Stress claims cases only relate to an individual and need to demonstrate and prove employer knew and recorded that individual was struggling and failed to act to address the toxic factors contributing to the stress . Reps can find additional guidance on stress in ISO 45003 .

Concern HSE created to protect employees and society but are not using enforcement powers.

Agreed that copies of presentations shown at seminar will be circulated to all attendees.

Next Unison Scottish Regional H & S forum 1st December 2021