

Inter Institutional Group on Health and Safety sub-group on Occupational Health – STRATEGY DOCUMENT

1. Background

Representatives of the Engineering Institutions, Hazards Forum, HSE and Engineering Council (UK) constituting the Inter-institutional Group on Health, Safety and risk), have agreed that Occupational Health issues should be a priority area for joint activity between the member bodies. This decision has been reached because:

- Maintenance of awareness and promotion of the importance of occupational health (OH) is a common area of interest and concern for all of the members. The issues are relevant to all engineers irrespective of their engineering discipline
- Keeping people well and in work is a national priority. Several national frameworks reflect this (e.g. the “National Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation”, “Choosing Health”, the Health and Safety Commission’s “Workplace Strategy to 2010 and beyond” and the government’s strategy document “Health Work and Well-being – caring for our future”).
- It is important to the well-being of engineers and those with whom they interact in the workplace. Large costs are associated with the failure to manage effectively OH issues and thus there are substantial benefits to companies from responding positively. However there is a consensus that the importance of the subject is currently not well understood, nor its impact appreciated by many managers and professional engineers. It is thus very much the “poor relation” in the H&S “pairing”.
- Occupational health professionals are anxious to work with and elicit the support of the engineering profession in order to promote the importance of OH as an issue. Working together is seen as an important step in raising awareness and promoting action. The Engineering Institutions can play a vital role in influencing responses to OH issues in the workplace

2. Objectives

Against this background, the objectives of the IIG are as follows:

- To promote joint working between occupational health and engineering professionals in order to improve practices relating to OH in the UK. This will draw on the competence and ability to influence of both groups.
- Through such joint action, to raise awareness of the importance of OH as an avoidable source of suffering to individuals and major loss to industry and the broader economy.

- To raise competence in dealing with OH so that action can be taken by engineering professionals at all levels in organisations to recognise and reduce the negative impacts of OH issues.
- To influence the wider community of stakeholders about the importance of OH issues and the need for the subject to receive increasing attention within business, the medical profession and government.

3. Proposed Actions.

The IIG subgroup thus proposes the following joint actions:

- To share knowledge of current initiatives and work aimed at raising awareness of OH issues among the parties involved and to work jointly to promote and support these.
- To work together to explain and promote the business case for OH and to bring the issues to the attention of the engineering community and those over whom they can exert influence. This recognises that engineers can influence OH issues both on a day-to-day level in the workplace and through good engineering practice. An example is through the good design of products, plant and processes.
- To promote the production, where required, of “toolkits” of best practice which can be used by engineers and others at all levels in order to develop greater understanding of the issues. These can help achieve greater recognition of ways in which preventing ill-health and promoting rehabilitation can be best addressed in the workplace.
- To promote OH issues in the education of engineers and managers.
- Wherever possible, to develop opportunities for joint communication and working between engineers and OH specialists in order to promote the importance of the issues to the wider community of stakeholders, including business leaders, employer and employee representative organisations, the medical profession and policy makers.