

HEALTH & SAFETY TIMES

ZOOMING IN ON IMPACT OF REMOTE WORK STRATEGY

**CALLS FOR 80% REDUCTION IN
MINOR INJURY AWARDS**

**NEW CODE OF PRACTICE TO TACKLE
WORKPLACE BULLYING**

**UPDATE ON THE HEALTHY
WORKPLACE FRAMEWORK**



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EDITOR'S COMMENT



There's been a major shift in workplace practices in Ireland since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic early last year, with remote working now the norm for thousands of employees across the country.

January saw the publication by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment of Ireland's first remote work strategy, entitled 'Making Remote Work – National Remote Working Strategy'.

This has set out a raft of plans to strengthen the rights and responsibilities of both employers and employees, to provide the infrastructure to work remotely, and provides guidance on how people can be empowered to work remotely from the office.

The new legislation on the cards this year is likely to have a major impact for both sides. And the right of employees to work remotely, which is proving to be a grey area on many levels, came to the fore in January in the first landmark ruling by the Workplace Relations Commission during this pandemic.

The WRC found in favour of an office-based employee, who had taken a case against her employer, having resigned in May 2020 during the first lockdown after the employer turned down her request to work from home.

The case has served as a reminder to employers of their obligations to adhere to health and safety legislation arising from the implications of Covid-19. However, one employment lawyer has noted in this issue of 'Health & Safety Times' "not every request for homeworking can or will be granted....and the employer may refuse the request if the business does not allow for it".

When all such issues on remote working have been settled by the new legislation, and when the dust finally settles, one thing is for sure - the fall-out in terms of people's mental health and wellbeing will certainly be felt long after we see an end to this pandemic. And only then will we be able to analyse and hopefully repair the damage that has been done. It is certainly going to be a long road ahead.

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CONTENTS

ISSUE 49

4 NEWS UPDATE

- » Dr David Begg appointed Chairperson of Workplace Relations Commission
- » Construction sites are "safer than the community" - CIF Director General
- » HSA seeks feedback on technical land-use planning advice
- » Mental health supports now in store for retail staff
- » H&S accreditation awarded to construction consultancy
- » Passport to employee health and resilience
- » First NISO/NISG 'Excellence in Safety' Award
- » PIAB fully backs insurance reform plan
- » Health Research Board strategy to make an impact



14 REMOTE WORKING LEGISLATION

The pandemic has certainly seen a seismic shift in work practices. And now that home working is the norm for thousands of employees across Ireland, with remote work hubs also set to become increasingly popular,

it looks like both employers and employees still have many issues to iron out before things go smoothly.

23 WORKPLACE BULLYING

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) have prepared a joint Code of Practice on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work, which came into operation on 23 December 2020, following a consultative process with the main stakeholders.



24 PERSONAL INJURY GUIDELINES

With new guidelines on damages for personal injuries by the Judicial Council scheduled to be adopted and published by 31 July, the Alliance for Insurance Reform is now calling for a major reduction on the level of minor injury awards by 80 per cent, to reflect international norms and norms already established by the Court of Appeal.



27 HEALTHY WORKPLACE FRAMEWORK



The Department of Health is currently in the process of updating content for the Healthy Workplace Framework, to take account of the new challenges of remote working in addition to the changes that have taken place in the workplace since the start of the pandemic.

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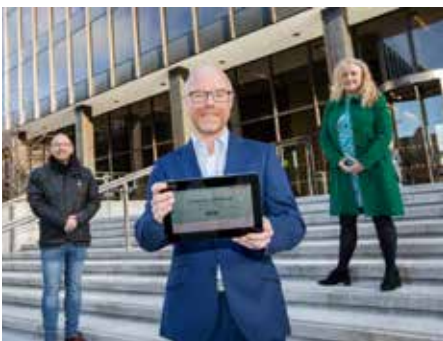
29 DCU COVID RESEARCH

New research by Dublin City University on the experiences of pre-hospital first responders during the pandemic reveals that contracting the virus and passing it to loved ones has been a primary source of worry for them. The DCU research team now hopes the findings will help inform the current response to Covid-19, improve risk management in the medium-term, and help build longer-term national resilience.

32 NISO-NISG SAFETY AWARDS

The Supreme Safety Award winner for 2020 – PM Group – was announced during an online ceremony of the 29th NISO/NISG Annual Occupational Safety Awards in January, and made safety award history by becoming the first organisation to win the top prize two years in a row!

35 MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE



A free new mental health service to support people working at the frontline during Covid-19 is being provided by turn2me – the first organisation in Ireland to provide professional mental health support services entirely online, with funding from Sláintecare.

37 HSA PROGRAMME OF WORK

The Health and Safety Authority's Programme for Work 2021 has set out its range of strategic objectives, such as the pandemic response, provision of advice on the requirements of Brexit, and support of the Government's Remote Working Strategy, by promoting the HSA's range of advice, e-tools and supports available.



41 WORKPLACE VENTILATION

Proper air quality and ventilation in the workplace is crucial in helping to prevent serious health issues, including the transmission of Covid-19 and other respiratory viruses. However, over 50% of respondents to a nationwide survey by Eirdata, in conjunction with Engineers Ireland, rated indoor air quality and ventilation in their organisations as 'poor' or 'average'.



42 IOSH NEWS

A new research study, commissioned by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) into workers' mental health problems, has called on employers to take a greater account of an individual's needs, and emphasises the need for more tailored approaches when planning a return to work by their employees.



44 EURO NEWS

48 UK NEWS

53 INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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Health & Safety Times has no connection with the Health and Safety Authority, which is also known as the National Authority for Occupational Safety and Health

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NEW CHAIRPERSON OF WORKPLACE RELATIONS COMMISSION

Former General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), Dr David Begg was recently appointed Chairperson of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) by Damien English TD, Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Replacing Paul Duffy, who chaired the WRC from 2015, Dr Begg's appointment for a five-year term (up to 31 January 2026) was made following an open recruitment campaign conducted by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). This is the second appointment to the position of Chairperson since the WRC was set up on 1 October 2015 (replacing the Labour Relations Commission).

Dr Begg also chairs the Pensions Authority, Mater Misericordiae University Hospital and the Fire Service National Oversight Implementation Group of the Department of the Environment. He is Adjunct Professor at Maynooth University's Institute of Social Sciences.

Begg's extensive history in the trade union movement included heading up the ESB Officers' Association, the Communications Workers' Union and ICTU, holding the latter role from 2001-2015 before he retired.

Between 1997 and 2001, he stepped away from trade



union activities to chair international aid agency Concern. He was also previously a director of the Central Bank of Ireland (1995-2010) and of The Irish Times Trust (2001-2011).

HSA SEEKS FEEDBACK ON TECHNICAL LAND-USE PLANNING ADVICE TO PLANNING AUTHORITIES

The Health and Safety Authority is seeking public feedback on new guidance that sets out its policy and practice in the provision of technical land-use planning advice to planning authorities.

The Seveso Directive [2012/18/EU] requires that the objectives of preventing major accidents and limiting their consequences are taken into account in land-use policy and this has been implemented by the COMAH Regulations of 2015.

The objectives are to be achieved through controls on:

- Siting and development of new establishments.
- Modifications to existing establishments.
- Development in the vicinity of establishments.

This proposed new guidance, setting out the HSA's policy and practice in providing technical land-use planning advice to planning authorities, replaces the guidance document 'Policy & Approach of the HSA to COMAH Risk-based Land Use Planning' (19 March 2010).

It reflects the relevant changes in the COMAH Regulations for 2015, especially in relation to land-use planning and significant modifications at COMAH establishments. It sets out a consistent risk-based approach to generating technical LUP advice across all sectors.

New sections have been added on the LNG, Recovered Natural Gas (RNG) and Distillery/Warehouse sectors, while provision is made to slot new sections into the framework as new sectors emerge.

Many of the parameters required for risk-based modelling have been specified and a revised approach to societal risk has been set out. The Guidance has been developed with input from COMAH technical experts.



For a more detailed overview visit bit.ly/3jpJvvH and for a copy of the Guidance on Technical Land-use Planning Advice visit bit.ly/3tmCjVu



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CONSTRUCTION SITES 'SAFER THAN THE COMMUNITY' CLAIMS CIF CHIEF

The Director General of the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) has said that the sector should be allowed to reopen on March 8 as it has a proven safety track record.

During an interview on RTÉ Radio's *Morning Ireland* (10 February), Tom Parlon pointed out that the construction sector operated to very strict procedures with very strong directives to workers.

Up to 40% of the sector had remained open during the current lockdown for essential building and direct foreign investment projects, all of which were closely monitored with the HSE, he added.

Clusters had been kept off-site with fewer than 20 cases of Covid-19, he noted, adding that whatever happened off-site was not in the control of employers. "Construction sites are very safe places with workers and employees being very careful to observe all procedures, and these sites are safer than the community."

The CIF Director General maintained that there was no reason why the sector could not open up on March 8, adding that there is "a very safe culture on site".

However, the construction site safety claims by Tom Parlon have been described as "ludicrous" by Dublin South West TD Paul Murphy, who is member of the Oireachtas Committee responsible for Employment.

"This is like groundhog day. Just as the case numbers start to come down we have big business lobbyists pushing to reopen, and spouting all sorts of false claims to justify it," Deputy Murphy said.

"It seems the major construction companies are happy to

sacrifice workers health and safety. Case numbers are currently stubbornly high, partly because many construction sites and companies that would have been closed in previous lockdowns have been let stay open this time around.

"The government should follow a Zero Covid strategy, with proper supports for workers and small businesses, and we will be able to plot a course to a proper reopening like they have done in New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere."



OVER 75% OF IRISH EMPLOYEES CALL FOR BETTER COMMUNICATIONS

A survey has found that over three quarters of Irish workers (77%) claim that their company's internal communications needs improvement. While almost half of employees (47%) receive daily official communications, a two-way communication is the number one need for improvement cited by them.

The findings come from research by Springboard Communications, which investigated the impact of remote working and feedback from employees on internal communications within their organisation.

"With the National Remote Work Strategy rolling out in September, now is the time for Irish organisations to audit how they are communicating with their employees. Are they doing it effectively with business goals in mind? Are they creating engaging, fresh content?" according to Susie Horgan, MD of Springboard Communications.

"When the sudden shift to remote working happened in March 2020,

many companies understandably upped the frequency of team communication with their teams. Nearly one third of those surveyed did not find the content shared useful. A year on, while management is talking to employees, are they really listening to what they need?"

Horgan said that 'The Internal Wire' service provided by her company offers a complete framework to businesses who want to ignite or revamp their internal communications strategies. From an internal audit to targeted content creation, she said her team will enable companies to inform, inspire and engage their employees.

Horgan added: "Our survey also found that almost one quarter are unclear about their organisation's business goals. To achieve those goals, employees need to first understand them. We understand the challenges facing Irish businesses.

"We have seen from our work that strategic internal communications will



Susie Horgan, MD, Springboard Communications

ensure results are delivered by clearly communicating them to employees.

This appetite for relevant knowledge is borne out by our findings – 35% say their organisation's internal communications could be improved by including clear and transparent business updates."



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MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT IN STORE FOR RETAILERS

The Convenience Stores and Newsagents Association (CSNA) is to provide mental health and wellbeing supports for its members and their employees nationwide this year, in partnership with Spectrum.Life.

A new digital platform and app will host a large range of services for CSNA members, hundreds of home fitness plans and over 200 nutritional recipes. The inclusion of an Employee Assistance Programme will provide 24/7 access to counsellors for mental health support, Covid specific podcasts and unlimited free phone support for store owners and employees.

Spectrum.Life is the largest provider of employer health and wellness services in Ireland, looking after the health and wellness needs of over one million users.

Chairperson of the CSNA Deals Committee Gus O'Hara said the association is delighted to partner with Spectrum.Life to provide members with "this very valuable support programme at a time of stress. Spectrum.Life is a very welcomed addition to our portfolio of over 35 exclusive CSNA Deals partners".

Spectrum.Life CEO Stephen Costello was also enthusiastic about the new supports for CSNA members. "We recognise that the uncertainty and mental health challenges posed by the coronavirus and supporting employee wellbeing has never

been more important. We look forward to supporting CSNA members during 2021," he said.



For more information visit www.csna.ie

HEALTH AND SAFETY ACCREDITATION FOR CONSTRUCTION CONSULTANCY

Irish operated and owned Ashview Consultants have been awarded the All-Star Construction Health & Safety Consultancy 2021 accreditation – an independently verified standard mark for indigenous businesses.

The accreditation is overseen by the All-Ireland Business Foundation*, whose adjudication panel is chaired by Dr Briga Hynes of the Kemmy Business School at the University of Limerick and Kieran Ring, CEO of the Global Institute of Logistics.

Dr Hynes said the accreditation, which is based on rigorous selection criteria, is now held by over 350 firms. "We evaluate each company's background, trustworthiness and performance, and we speak to customers, employees and vendors," she noted.

Ashview Consultants has over 200 years of construction experience across the team, and is due to make a number of announcements this year as part of their continued growth across the health and safety sector.

"We advise and consult on all health and safety matters from initial concept through to design, construction, and future maintenance, keeping our clients informed at all stages of the project. We provide PSDP and PSCS services to the industry on a broad spectrum of projects, these range from commercial, residential, student accommodation, data centres, logistics centres, retail, shopping centres and civil projects," noted Paul O'Shea, MD of Ashview Consultants.

**The All-Ireland Business Foundation is responsible for overseeing the All-Ireland Business Summit and All-Star awards, ongoing All-Star accreditation, Thought Leader awards and promoting peer dialogue among members.*



Paul O'Shea, MD of Ashview Consultants, said the award is "recognition of our team's achievements over the past 15 years, our level of expertise and the systematic internal processes we have implemented to guarantee unrivalled customer service to our clients".



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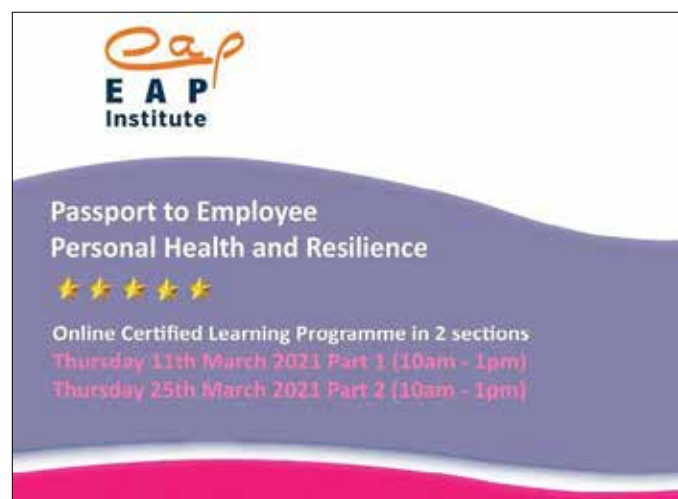
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PASSPORT TO EMPLOYEE PERSONAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE

The EAP Institute's next online certified training course on employee personal health and resilience will take place on Thursday 11 and Thursday 25 March.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in Ireland, the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) highlighted the impact of workplace stress on employee mental health.

IOSH continues to urge its members to think safety, compliance, risk assessments and employee support therapy to address the mental health issues now impacting the workplace. In May 2019, the organisation produced guidance for businesses on how to design robust systems to manage the risk of mental health issues.



A booking fee of €225 can be made via www.eapinstitute.com, contact Irene Kenny, Conference Administrator, on 051-855733 or email: irene.kenny@eapinstitute.com

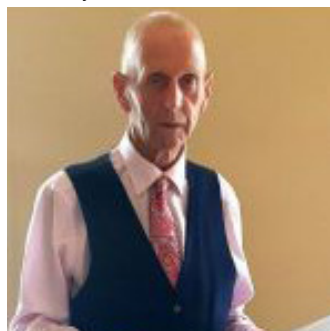
At the end of this online course and assignment participants will have the skill-sets to:

- Develop a COVID-19 Response Plan to protect employee mental health.
- Maintain personal Spiritual, Emotional, Mental and Physical (SEMP) health.
- Maintain personal health and develop resilience.

The online certified training course will be presented by Maurice Quinlan, Director of EAP Institute, and food and nutrition consultant Paula Mee.

Maurice Quinlan first introduced the Occupational Alcoholism Programme (OAPs) concept to Europe and hosted the first seminar on this topic in Dublin's Clarence Hotel in September 1980. In 2018 he designed a new model of Employee Support Services (ESS) to manage workplace mental health risks.

Paula Mee provides a range of services in nutrition, corporate wellness, marketing, communications, recipes and menu analysis and product development. Her client portfolio includes those from the food and pharmaceutical industry, educational organisations, catering and retail sector, corporate industry and other healthcare professional groups.



INSURANCE REFORM PLAN FULLY BACKED BY PIAB

Welcoming the Government's Action Plan for Insurance Reform, launched in December 2020, the Chief Executive of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) has said they will "fully back and implement the measures in the plan with all urgency".

PIAB Chief Executive Rosalind Carroll said the Board has been a strong supporter of measures that could improve and enhance the operation of their model, thereby bringing benefits to everyone impacted by insurance costs.

"The cost of claims and insurance, including public and employer liability, is a very serious challenge for wide sections of Irish society as the cost and availability of insurance can seriously affect small and medium-sized businesses, as well as the community, childcare and sports sectors, and individual households. Addressing this is even more important in the context of the recovery of the economy from the effects of the pandemic.

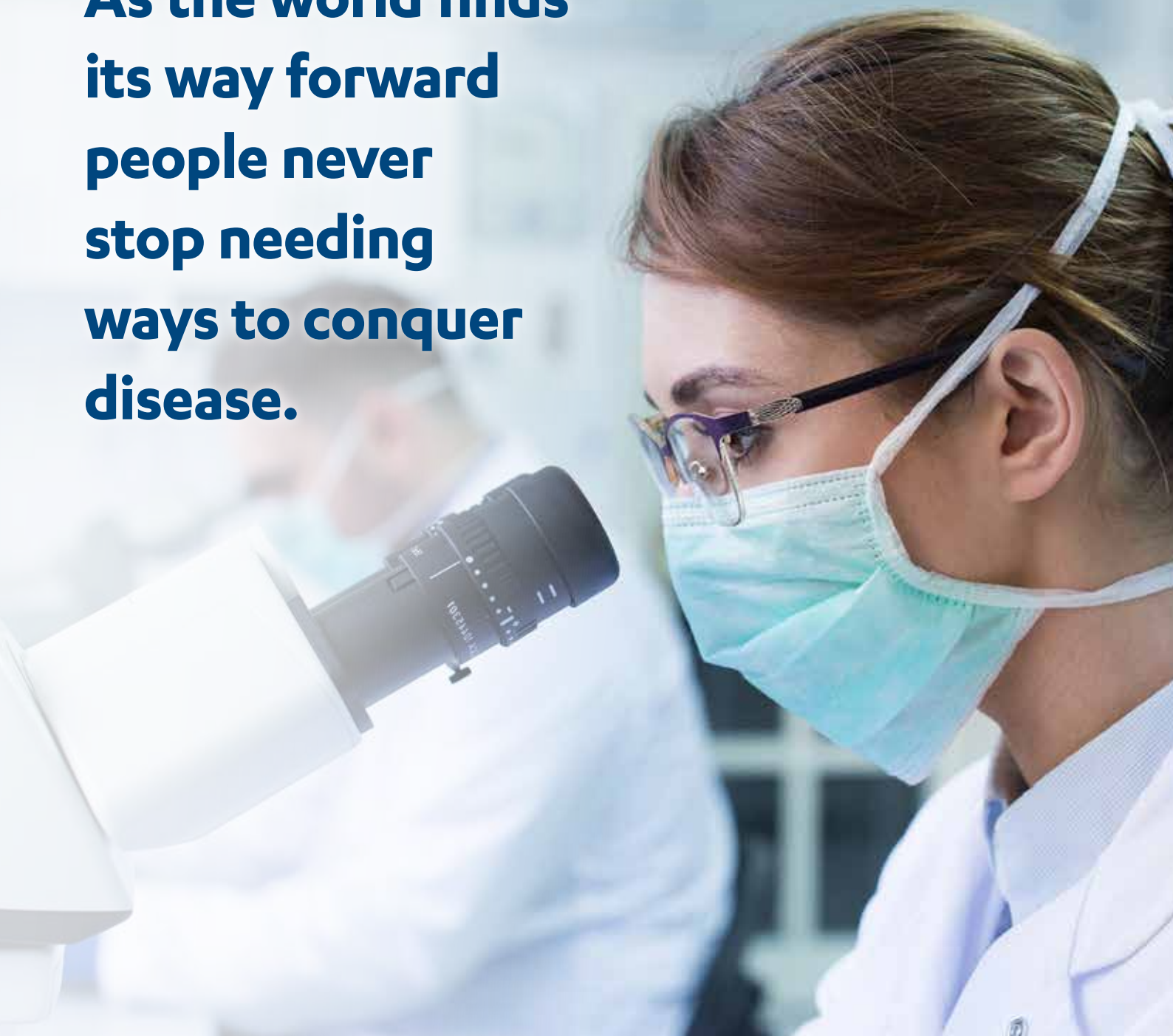
"The recent Central Bank report showed the major benefits in terms of cost and time savings through the resolution of personal injury claims through the PIAB service. It is so

important to ensure the services of PIAB are utilised more, to the benefit of injured parties, policy-holders and wider society, who ultimately bear the burden of additional costs."



Resolving personal injury claims through the PIAB service has major cost-saving benefits - Rosalind Carroll, PIAB chief

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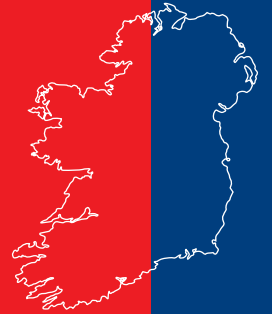
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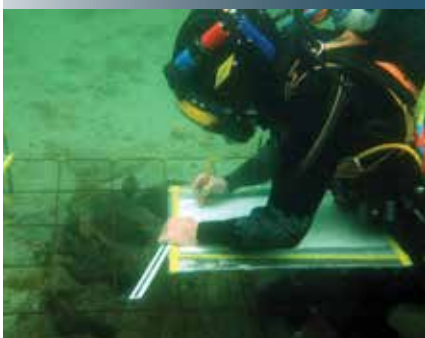


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FIRST COMPANY TO WIN NISO/NISG 'EXCELLENCE IN SAFETY' AWARD

Actavo has become the first company to receive the new 'Excellence in Safety' Award, which was presented online at the NISO/NISG 29th Annual All-Ireland Occupational Safety Awards 2020 in January.

This new award, which is in recognition of more than 15 consecutive years at distinction level or above, was one of two presented to Actavo; the company also picked up the prestigious Silver Award for 2020, in recognition of its rigorous health and safety standards and excellent results.

"Every team across the organisation deserves credit for this recognition, because on a company-wide basis, we embed our core value 'live safety' into our culture and operations to the extent that is part of the DNA of every aspect of our service delivery and how we work together as a team," noted Willie Ryan, Actavo's Director of Global EHS and IT.

Harry Galvin, NISO President, said: "The company's achievements in the safety awards, particularly over the last few years, have been outstanding, having won the Supreme, Gold, Silver and Bronze awards.

"Winning the Silver Award and becoming the first company to win the Excellence in Safety award, Actavo has shown its commitment to pursuing the highest standards of safety for its staff, customers and the general public," he added.

In 2019 the company received a Higher Distinction Award; a Bronze Award in 2018; and the Supreme Award in 2015 as Sierra (now Actavo | Network Solutions).

For more information on the NISO/NISG Safety Awards turn to pages 32-33.



Actavo's CEO Brian Kelly and Global EHS and IT Director Willie Ryan.

HEALTH RESEARCH BOARD STRATEGY AIMS TO MAKE AN IMPACT

The Health Research Board's new strategy 'Health Research – Making an Impact' sets out a clear direction for health and social care research over the next five years, taking into account the fact that people and patients must be central to the research process.

Dr Mairéad O'Driscoll, Chief Executive at the HRB, believes involving people in the work undertaken and funded by the Board, leads to improved research, outcomes and lives. "The pandemic has highlighted that while our health system depends on the economy, without a well-functioning

health and research system, economies can quickly grind to a halt.

"This means we must consider health research as a long-term investment, positioning us to tackle health challenges and informing us how to prevent illness and improve people's care," she added.

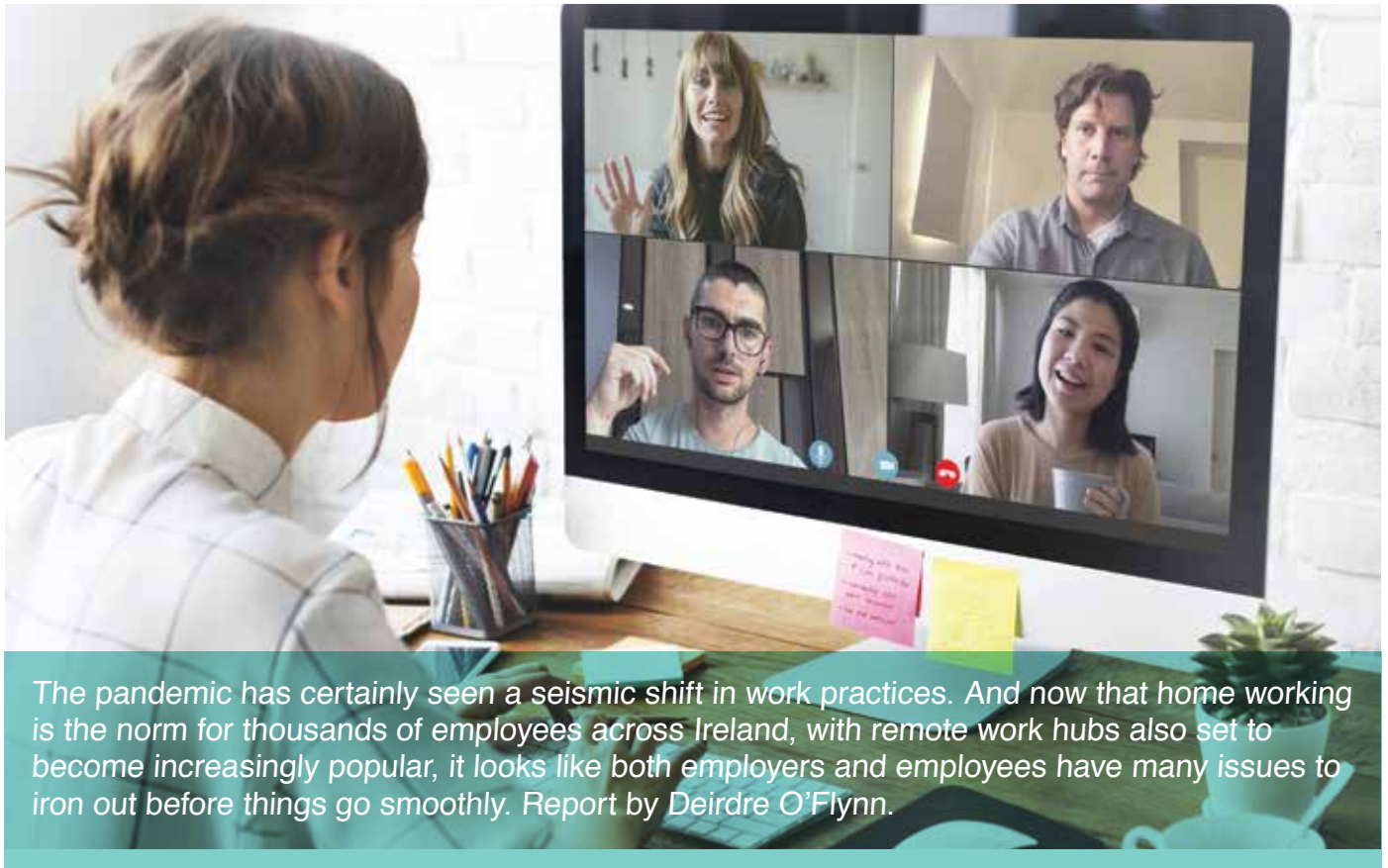
"Over the next five years, the HRB will invest in high-quality health and social care research that has real value and impact – research that shapes policy and practice; research that delivers value for society and the economy; and, most importantly, research that puts people at the centre, improving their health as well as the care they receive."

The Health Research Board's strategy also stresses the importance of international research partnerships. "Many of the health challenges we face are global and the HRB is committed to fostering and enhancing European and international coordination, collaboration and engagement in health research, as well as providing continuous support to the Irish health research community to compete in EU funding programmes," noted Dr O'Driscoll.



Health research is needed to tackle health challenges and help to prevent illness and improve people's care, according to Dr Mairéad O'Driscoll, HRB Chief Executive.

STRATEGY TO SORT OUT REMOTE WORKING ON BOTH SIDES



The pandemic has certainly seen a seismic shift in work practices. And now that home working is the norm for thousands of employees across Ireland, with remote work hubs also set to become increasingly popular, it looks like both employers and employees have many issues to iron out before things go smoothly. Report by Deirdre O'Flynn.

New legislation is on the cards this year to provide employees with the right to request to work remotely.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment also intends to introduce a legally admissible code of practice on the right to disconnect from work – covering phone calls, emails, and switch-off time.

These announcements were made in January following the publication of Ireland's first National Remote Work Strategy to make remote working a permanent option for life after the pandemic.

The Department's 'Making Remote Work – National Remote Working Strategy' has outlined the vision for the future of remote working in Ireland. It sets out plans to strengthen the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees, to provide the infrastructure

to work remotely, and provides clear guidance on how people can be empowered to work remotely from the office (see 'Side Panel 2' on the list of actions outlined in the strategy).

CASE IS IMPORTANT REMINDER

Given the speed with which homeworking was introduced – and with remote work hubs set to become increasingly popular – it might be expected that there are issues still to be ironed out before things go smoothly.

One indicator came in January when the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) ordered an employer to pay compensation to an employee who resigned in May 2020 during the first lockdown after the employer turned down her request to work from home.

Following this first such ruling by the WRC, IBEC's Director of Employer Relations Maeve McElwee had said



"The employer may refuse the request for homeworking if the business does not allow for it" – Siobhara Rush, partner and head of the Dublin office of employment law firm Lewis Silkin.



Employers have gone from managing one office to being responsible for multiple work spaces, according to Criona Turley, CEO and co-founder of Capella.

that the case served as “an important reminder” to employers of their obligations to adhere to health and safety legislation arising from the implications of Covid-19. She noted that this included when working remotely, where appropriate, in line with

public health guidance.

However, McElwee pointed out that the WRC adjudicator had specified that “...this case does not relate to a general right to work from home or to work remotely. It relates to the circumstances arising from the Covid-19 pandemic”.

DEFINITION OF HOMEWORKING

Siobhra Rush, managing partner and head of the Dublin office of employment law firm Lewis Silkin, told ‘Health & Safety Times’ that not every request for homeworking can or will be granted. “The employer may refuse the request if the business does not allow for it,” she added.

Tánaiste Leo Varadkar TD also acknowledged this issue at the launch of the National Remote Work Strategy in January, when he said: “If somebody has the right to request remote working, the onus is on the employer to either say ‘yes’ or explain why not and they would have to give reasons,” he said, adding that these reasons could be challenged by the WRC.

Up until now, there has been no real definition of what constitutes working from home, according to Rush, and she added that there’s no clarity around “what is the minimum time to be considered working from home – in terms of hours, days – and what additional rules will kick in”.

On the health and safety front, once an employee is working from home, that location becomes their place of work and both the employer and employee have responsibilities under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, and the underpinning health and safety principles.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) has also published a document – *Guidance on Working from Home for Employers and Employees* – which has clarified the

EMPLOYERS URGED TO BE COMPLIANT BY INSURANCE IRELAND’S CHIEF EXECUTIVE

In relation to the level of Employer Liability (EL) claims arising from employees working from home, Insurance Ireland’s Chief Executive Moyagh Murdock told ‘Health & Safety Times’ that “our members are not experiencing many claims, but I would still urge employers to ensure that they are compliant”.

She also answered our following questions in relation to the implications for employers and the advice from the insurance companies.

What are EL insurance implications for employers in terms of employees working from home?

- EL policies cover the employer’s legal liability to employees for injury arising out of, and in the course of, their employment.
- This includes when the employee is working from home as that is their place of work.

What would happen if an employee was sitting at the desk, jumped up because one of the children was crying and injured themselves? Would they have a claim under the EL policy?

- The employee would need to show that their employer was legally liable for the injury and that liability would turn on the facts of the case.
- If the employer was found to be legally liable, the EL policy would kick in.

What advice are insurers giving to employers in the context of EL and working from home?

- Insurers are generally advising their policyholders to mitigate the EL risk.
- Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005, employers have specific duties to ensure the safety, health and welfare at work of all employees.
- The HSA published guidance for employers and employees on working from home, which we’d urge them to consult to make sure they are fully compliant.



Moyagh Murdock, CEO of Insurance Ireland, urges employers to ensure they are compliant.



One of the actions to be implemented in 2021 is the introduction of a legally admissible code of practice on the right to disconnect from work – covering phone calls, emails and switch-off time.

employer's responsibility to ensure that the employee has a safe place and equipment to do their work

RISK ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

"Employers must do a risk assessment of the homeworking environment," Rush noted. "They should have a home working policy and train their employees on that – it should outline what is expected of employees and whether they should be available to come to the office. I foresee a hybrid model where people may work two or three days at home and the other days in the office."

Significantly, an employer's responsibilities also extend to a remote working hub if that is where their employee is working from. "The employer needs to ensure that the employee has the right equipment, and that the workspace is suitable there – all of this [in relation to remote working] requires buy-in and investment from employers," she said.

Employees also have responsibilities under the Safety, Health and Welfare at

Work Act. "They have a responsibility to follow instructions and protect themselves from harm, to take care of equipment", and to follow the document in the HSA's guidance.

In the current climate, risk assessments of homeworking spaces are being carried out virtually – employees photograph or video their workplace on their smartphone and are then instructed and trained on how to improve their space. Indeed, a comprehensive homeworking assessment/risk assessment checklist is contained in the HSA Guidance document.

DISCONNECTING FROM WORK

"Working time is also a health and safety issue," said Síobhra Rush. "It can be difficult for employees whose children are not in school during lockdown to maintain their working hours. There is also a lot of work creep", she added, with many employees now having to work at night to keep up with their workload or meet deadlines.

This is recognised in the National Remote Work Strategy and one of the actions to be implemented in 2021 is the introduction of a legally admissible code of practice on the right to disconnect from work – covering phone calls, emails, and switch-off time.

"Remote working today is not a reflection of how it will be at the end of the pandemic. However, it will remain in some form; employers will need to have proper procedures, employees will need to be trained, so that there will be a more structured approach in place," according to Rush.

SAFE ERGONOMIC WORKPLACES

A Dublin-based workplace solutions company has expanded its business designing ergonomic workspaces to providing an online platform that addresses employers' liability around staff working from home.

"Essentially, employees log on to our portal, receive ergonomic training on how their workplace should be set up, and then complete a self-assessment,



In January the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) ordered an employer to pay compensation to an employee who resigned in May 2020 during the first lockdown after the employer turned down her request to work from home.

and also upload images of their workplace,” Criona Turley, CEO and co-founder of Capella told ‘Health & Safety Times’. “Our software system

measures their workplace, a member of our ergonomic team analyses the results and we issue a risk assessment and recommendations for each employee.

The employer receives all the results in a dashboard and we highlight high-risk employees, as well as supplying a suggested equipment list.”

Turley said that many employers thought homeworking would last for a few months but that, increasingly, health and safety professionals and employers are becoming overwhelmed. “They’ve gone from managing one office to being responsible for managing multiple work spaces.”

Whilst solutions – such as a laptop stand – may not be expensive, not ensuring safe workplaces can prove to be costly for employers. If they do not take adequate precautions to ensure a safe workplace for their staff, that could trigger costly claims such as musculoskeletal complaints to slips, trips, and falls.

“We had one employee who sat on a beanbag for a year with a laptop on his lap,” recalled Turley. This, she said, can happen “in situations with young kids, and they may be in their first job”. This is where a prompt risk assessment and employer-employee engagement can resolve the situation.

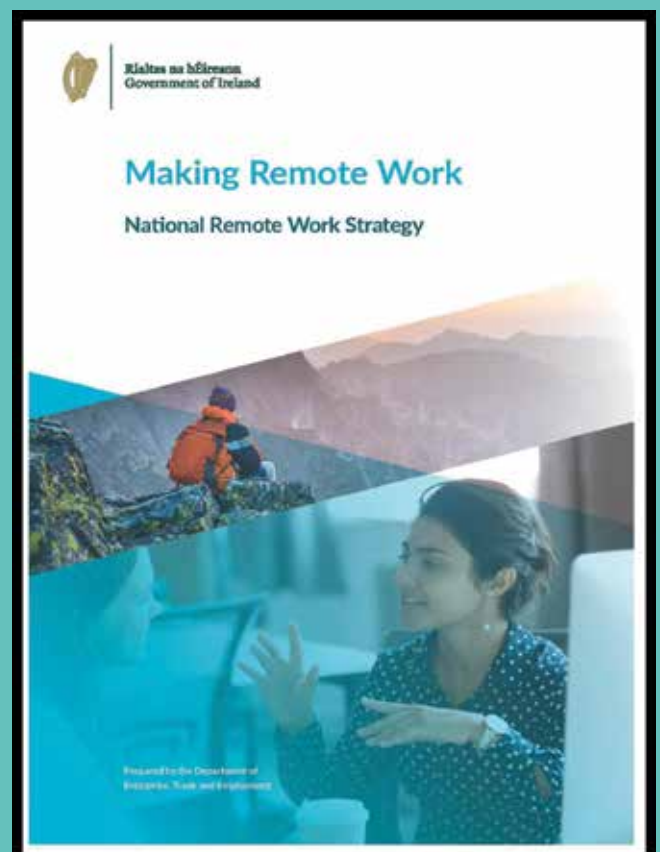
NATIONAL REMOTE WORK STRATEGY HEADLINE ACTIONS

The following actions will be completed over the course of this year, and an Implementation Group will be formed to monitor the progress of the actions with meetings to be held every four months.

- Legislate to provide employees the right to request remote working.
- Introduce a legally admissible Code of Practice on the right to disconnect from work – covering phone calls, emails and switch-off time.
- Invest in remote work hubs, ensuring they are in locations that suit commuters and are close to childcare facilities.
- Explore the acceleration of the National Broadband Plan.
- Review the treatment of remote working for the purposes of tax and expenditure in the next Budget.
- Mandate that home and remote working should be the norm for 20% of public sector employees.

The ‘Making Remote Work – National Remote Working Strategy’ was developed under the guidance of a broad Interdepartmental Group consisting of government departments and state agencies. The research for the strategy draws from the findings of the ‘Remote Work in Ireland’ report (published in December 2019), the results of the Public Consultation on Remote Work Guidance and new research carried out on the topic in 2020.

(Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment)





THE NATIONAL AMBULANCE SERVICE



COVID-19 Response

On 4th March 2020 the NAS responded to the COVID 19 emergency, the NAS moved quickly to perform COVID19 home testing by redeploying front-line ambulance clinicians from emergency response to COVID19 testing, as solo responders in Rapid Response Vehicles (RRV). NAS staff were trained in nasopharyngeal/oropharyngeal swabbing and sample handling, supply chains for testing kits and PPE were put in place, and arrangements made to facilitate expedited transport of completed tests to the National Virus Reference Laboratory.

NAS then introduced 'pop-up' testing centres to allow for testing of large groups of people in a controlled environment and further developed into static site testing with our colleagues in community health.

The NAS has been maintaining normal operations during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has additional responsibility for COVID-specific initiatives. At a very early stage in the COVID-19 pandemic the NAS was determined to be a key provider of COVID-19 testing, and has carried out in excess of **308,000** tests (07:00hrs 8th Feb 2021). This includes testing in home, community and residential care settings. The NAS also implemented a dedicated COVID-19 command centre with increased clinical capacity, supported by the introduction of an identification system which allows staff on the 112/999 call system to assess patients who may be COVID-19 positive. COVID-19 specific Pre-Hospital patient assessment and treatment protocols were put in place which emphasise treatment at home and ensure transport to an acute hospital is reserved for serious or life threatening cases.

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TEAM LEADERSHIP TIPS FOR REMOTE WORKING

For many office-based teams, the Covid-19 pandemic has meant prolonged periods of virtual working during a time of heightened pressure. Behavioural science consultant Lizzie Broadbent explores how this has affected team relationships, the implications for wellbeing and what team leaders can do to improve the situation.

The pandemic has fundamentally affected all aspects of our lives and will continue to do so for months to come. For those who were working in an office-based team up until March 2020 and were used to seeing colleagues in person, regularly, this shift to remote working has had particularly marked effects.

With remote working likely to be a fact of life for much of this year also, now is a good time to step back and reflect on the habits you have got into, what is working and what you may want to change.

From one perspective, we have never been more connected to the people we work with. Personal situations are much more visible. We have seen into another's living spaces, we know who has patchy broadband and who has access to a garden.

Geographic tiers and varying country-wide restrictions triggered conversations about where parents and siblings live. School closures lead to shared experiences of the demands of home-schooling: we know who has children, how many and what age; several of them will have made unexpected appearances in meetings.

MORE PHYSICALLY DISCONNECTED

However, we are mainly seeing one another from the chest up, making it hard to pick up all the signs we normally get from body language. In team meetings, we each spend the vast majority of the time on mute.

The casual but vital moments of connection with people outside our core working team, which used to come with bumping into others in the canteen or having a quick chat on the way to the loo, have all been lost.

Even a mid-meeting coffee break now means a solitary and silent stroll to the kettle rather than milling around and discussing the latest news or who is going to win Bake Off.

PROVING A STRUGGLE FOR INTROVERTS

This change in working and engagement patterns was hailed as an opportunity for introverts. It was thought that a move away from long face-to-face workshops to more asynchronous working would favour introverts, giving them more space to think and increasing their overall participation.

It was anticipated that those who get their energy from being with others and like to think on their feet would find it harder to manage the significant reduction in interaction.

However, the data suggests that introverts are struggling more – on a personal level at least. With smaller online social

networks and a lower propensity to experiment with virtual socialising approaches, they are more likely to feel lonely and isolated.

TAKING SILENCE AS AGREEMENT

Intimacy is one of the building blocks of trust which, at a group level, manifests itself as psychological safety. It has been shown that, in teams with higher levels of psychological safety, people are more likely to speak up, share concerns, highlight risks and learn from mistakes. If levels of trust start to fall within the group, this vital human early-warning system will no longer work as effectively.

People shifting around in their chair or making small sounds of agreement or disagreement are sounds that, in physical meetings, give valuable clues about sentiment. If we only see people's heads and they are on mute, this information is all lost.

"I'll take silence as agreement" is now a commonly used phrase. It might feel efficient but is not necessarily effective: someone scrambles to unmute themselves in time to make their point or simply feels like it is too much effort for what may feel like a small point.



The shift to remote working since March 2020 has had particularly marked effects, according to Lizzie Broadbent.



Boston Scientific is dedicated to transforming lives through innovative medical solutions that improve the health of patients around the world.

To all those working in Health & Safety

Boston Scientific would like to express huge thanks for all your hard work in keeping us safe and healthy during the Covid-19 pandemic. The sudden and unexpected challenges you have faced are unprecedented in modern times.

We appreciate the enormous personal sacrifices you have made during this difficult time. Thank you for your dedication and immense courage. The innovation of those working in Health & Safety across Ireland has been inspiring.

As we now emerge from lockdown, we wish you all the best going forward and hope you all get a well-earned rest soon.

From everyone at Boston Scientific



The conversation moves on, concerns go unstated, risks are not captured. The counter-intuitive evidence about the impact of lockdowns on introverts shows how dangerous it can be to leave assumptions untested.

New norms establish themselves quickly, biases left unchecked can quickly influence narrative and actions. For health, safety and wellbeing interventions to meet people's needs, those needs must be properly understood.

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

Many organisations have seen productivity gains from the increase in remote working so it is likely to be with us in some form even when lockdowns ease. Regularly reviewing and adjusting team ways of working will help ensure that it is safe and healthy for both team members and leaders.

1. Check in with your team

Group check-ins contribute to an ongoing culture of trust and openness, helping team members stay in touch with one another's ups and downs, show empathy and offer practical help. Make check-in time count by keeping it fresh and meaningful.

2. Discuss wellbeing together

Stress and wellbeing are highly personal. However, using a common framework and language makes it easier to have discussions about individual challenges as a group. One useful model is the stress container, developed by Mental Health First Aid.

This visualises three variables in managing pressure: the size and type of inflow, the options for releasing pressure and your coping capacity (which is affected by factors such as sleep, diet and uncertainty).

Our normal routines have been disrupted and we are all constantly trying new approaches to managing our physical and mental health. Sharing these challenges and getting fresh ideas can bring much-needed fresh thinking and reduce the sense of isolation.

3. Commit to group decisions

If you feel like you didn't really participate in a decision-making process, your commitment is likely to be lower to the result. If you are leading a group in a decision-making discussion, be very clear about the decision that is being proposed.

Set up virtual break-out rooms for small group discussions

on concerns before re-grouping for the final decision. Use the chat or virtual whiteboards to gather opinions, so that it is easy to share the content of small group discussions in the larger group. Use online polling so that people can vote yes, no or "maybe" or ask for a show of hands (real hands, not small yellow "zoom" hands).

4. Highlights and achievements

In high-pressure situations, it is natural to focus on the problems and issues and turn to what's next as soon as a goal has been achieved. This can come at the expense of acknowledging what has been achieved.

As a leader, write down the different recognition options, including a short, meaningful thank you, highlighting the work of someone in another team to their boss, putting a story on the intranet, sending a gift or giving a bonus.

Post the list somewhere where you will see it regularly. Make sure you make time in meetings for sharing highlights and achievements and ask team members to say what they are proud of. Remember: the team that "hurrahs" together, stays together!

Founder of www.seenheardconsultancy.com Lizzie Broadbent provides advice on applying behavioural science to design effective programmes of change and build sustainable improvements in capability. This article by RoSPA is reproduced courtesy of Safety Groups UK.



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NEW CODE OF PRACTICE TACKLES WORKPLACE BULLYING

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) have prepared a joint Code of Practice on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work, which came into operation on 23 December 2020, following a consultative process with the main stakeholders.

The Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail Damien English TD recently made an Order under the Industrial Relations Act 1990 and also approved the publication of the new WRC/HSA Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

This Code of Practice, which came into effect on 23 December 2020, replaces the previous Code of the same name issued by the HSA in March 2007 and the Code of Practice Detailing Procedures for Addressing Bullying in the Workplace issued by the Labour Relations Commission in 2002, effectively combining them into a single operational Code.

This revised dual Code, which applies to all employments in Ireland irrespective of whether employees work at a fixed location, at home or are mobile, provides practical guidance on the management of workplace bullying complaints and on the prevention of workplace bullying. These are in line with the requirements of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

In addition, the Code reflects the WRC's objective to achieve harmonious working relations between employers and employees through promoting compliance with relevant employment, equality and equal status legislation and codes of practice, early dispute resolution, mediation, conciliation, facilitation and advisory services, and adjudication on complaints and disputes.

PRACTICAL ADVICE PROVIDED

In welcoming the Code Minister English said "The Code provides practical guidance for organisations regarding the importance of having in place the right measures of anti-bullying policies and procedures, the existence of which will have clear benefits for both employees and the employing organisations."

With the two separate Codes in existence for almost two decades, the WRC's Director General Liam Kelly said that "this development, where the WRC worked with the HSA



The Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work is available at www.workplacelrelations.ie and www.hsa.ie

and employer and employee representatives to consolidate them into a single publication, will bring further clarity to all workplaces. And I hope it will assist in reducing workplace bullying incidences, and help employers and employees to resolve and address them when they do occur."

Dr Sharon McGuinness, HSA's Chief Executive Officer, added: "Employers have a duty to manage and conduct work activities to prevent any improper conduct or behaviour likely to put an employee's safety, health or welfare at risk."

"This joint Code contains practical guidance on how to prevent and address workplace bullying which will be of significant benefit to employers, employees and their representatives. Workplace bullying is a serious health and safety issue and both employers and employees have a role in promoting a positive workplace free from such behaviours."

INSURANCE ALLIANCE SEEKS REDUCTION IN MINOR INJURY AWARDS

With new guidelines on damages for personal injuries by the Judicial Council scheduled to be adopted and published by 31 July, the Alliance for Insurance Reform is now calling for a major reduction on the level of minor injury awards by 80 per cent, to reflect international norms and norms already established by the Court of Appeal.



Expressing serious concerns regarding Judicial Council guidelines on personal injury pay-outs (which are set to replace the Book of Quantum), the Alliance for Insurance Reform (AIR) has called on the judiciary to have regard to the common good in their deliberations and reduce by 80% the number of minor personal injury awards.

“What we award for minor, fully recovered injuries in Ireland is 4.4 times higher than in England and Wales and further multiples higher than other European jurisdictions,” said Peter Boland, Director of the Alliance, which represents charities, voluntary and community groups, sports and cultural organisations and SMEs severely affected by insurance costs.

“An 80% reduction on minor injuries would only bring us down to where England and Wales currently are and would still be nowhere near the equivalent damages in other European countries,” he added, pointing out that England and Wales are also set to further slash their damages for minor whiplash injuries later this year.

The Alliance has expressed serious concerns at reports that the Judicial Council is tending towards the adoption of guidelines that would reflect those in the Green Book – Northern Ireland’s personal injuries guidelines.

“MASQUERADING AS REFORM”

Boland said that such a development would be “unlikely to lead to meaningful reductions in the cost of personal injury claims and hence insurance”, unless it came hand-in-hand with wholesale reform of the Irish legal system.

“Otherwise, using the Green Book as a reference point would be the status quo masquerading as reform. The adoption and publication of new Judicial Personal Injury Guidelines have been postponed until 20 February, and we welcome any opportunity for serious reflection on the guidelines.

“However, we call on the Judicial Council, in their deliberations, to have regard to the common good in reducing general damages for fully recovered minor injuries by at least 80% to reflect

international norms and norms already established by the Court of Appeal.”

Eoin McCambridge, Managing Director of McCambridge’s of Galway and AIR Director, said “The single biggest element of the cost of insurance, as determined by the Cost of Insurance Working Group, the Personal Injuries Commission and the Central Bank’s National Claims Information Database, is compensation; and general damages for minor injuries account for the vast majority of compensation pay-outs.

Tracy Sheridan, owner of ‘Kidspace’ play centres in Rathfarnham and Rathcoole and also AIR Director, added that insurance costs remain an existential issue for Irish SMEs, charities, sports and cultural organisations, voluntary and community groups.

“The Irish economy is not going to recover from Covid-19 through SMEs, or Irish society through the voluntary and community sector, unless insurance is sorted,” she pointed out.



The awards for minor injuries in Ireland is 4.4 times higher than in England and Wales, according to Peter Boland, Director of the Alliance for Insurance Reform.

LITIGATION AND INSURANCE

Meanwhile, the CEO of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) is working with government ministers to boost PIAB's powers and help to bring down insurance costs.

Rosalind Carroll said that she is "passionate about getting things done in this area as you can see the crippling impact insurance and claims are having on businesses".

Carroll said recent figures from the Central Bank showed that the PIAB can deliver "for a fraction of the cost and in less time" in comparison to litigation. Of injury claimant settlements between 2015 and 2019, half the number of injury claimants settled directly, 17 per cent settled through the PIAB while one third settled through litigation.

This corresponds to 22 per cent of injury costs settled directly, 12 per cent settled through PIAB and around two-thirds (67 per cent) settled through litigation.

AVERAGE LEGAL COSTS

The average legal costs in personal injury cases settled through litigation was over €23,000 between 2015 and 2019, according to new figures published by the Central Bank of Ireland.

The figures are revealed in the second annual private motor insurance report of the National Claims Information Database (NCID).

Of injury claimant settlements between 2015 and 2019, half of injury claimants settled directly, 17 per cent settled through the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) and a third settled through litigation.

This corresponds to 22 per cent of injury costs settled directly, 12 per cent settled through PIAB and around two-thirds (67 per cent) settled through litigation. For direct settlements, the average compensation was €13,427 and average legal costs were €1,397, while for PIAB settlements,

the average compensation was €23,137 and average legal costs were €716.

For litigated settlements, the average compensation was €46,214 and the average legal costs were €23,409. Among 85 per cent of litigated settlements, which were settled for less than €100,000, the average compensation was €23,572 and the average legal costs were €14,949.

The report also reveals that the average cost of a claim rose 65 per cent between 2009 and 2019 while the frequency of claims fell by 45 per cent. The cost of claims per policy fell by nine per cent while the average earned premium per policy rose by over one third (35 per cent).

Claims costs were 72 per cent of earned premium between 2009 and 2019. In 2009, there was a loss ratio of 88 per cent; this was down to 59 per cent in 2019.

Mark Cassidy, Director of Economics and Statistics at the Central Bank, said the second motor insurance report provided key information to enable understanding of the operation of the motor insurance market in Ireland.

"The insurance industry plays a critical role in the Irish financial services industry and for the economy and its citizens. The new data that will improve transparency in the Irish motor insurance market, particularly with regard to claims costs, settlement channels and premiums paid by customers," he noted in a recent report by 'Irish Legal News'.

The NCID's second annual private motor insurance report was extended in 2020 to provide further information on settlement channels, premium trends and information on claim development patterns. Cassidy said these were "important enhancements that can assist market participants in their understanding of claims costs".



Following her appointment to the PIAB as CEO in 2019, Rosalind Carroll took up the role with effect in March 2020, having been CEO of the Residential Tenancies Board since 2016.



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UPDATE ON THE HEALTHY WORKPLACE FRAMEWORK

The Department of Health is currently in the process of updating content for the Healthy Workplace Framework, to take account of the new challenges of remote working in addition to the changes that have taken place in the workplace since the start of the pandemic.

This last year has posed challenges for everyone, and like many other projects the work on the Healthy Workplace Framework was deferred due to COVID-19 outbreak, according to Biddy O'Neill, National Project Lead with the Health and Wellbeing Programme at the Department of Health.

Having revisited the framework, which forms part of the Department's Health and Wellbeing Programme, she said that they are now in the process of updating content. "Many workplaces have reported that COVID-19 placed a spotlight on wellbeing and we hope that the new framework will give strategic direction and guidance to all organisations," she added.

"One of our priorities is to develop the website with tools and resources to support workplaces in the process of becoming a 'Healthy Workplace' and creating a platform to share case studies. We continue to be supported by the Institute of Public Health in finalising the framework, and we will announce a launch date in due course."

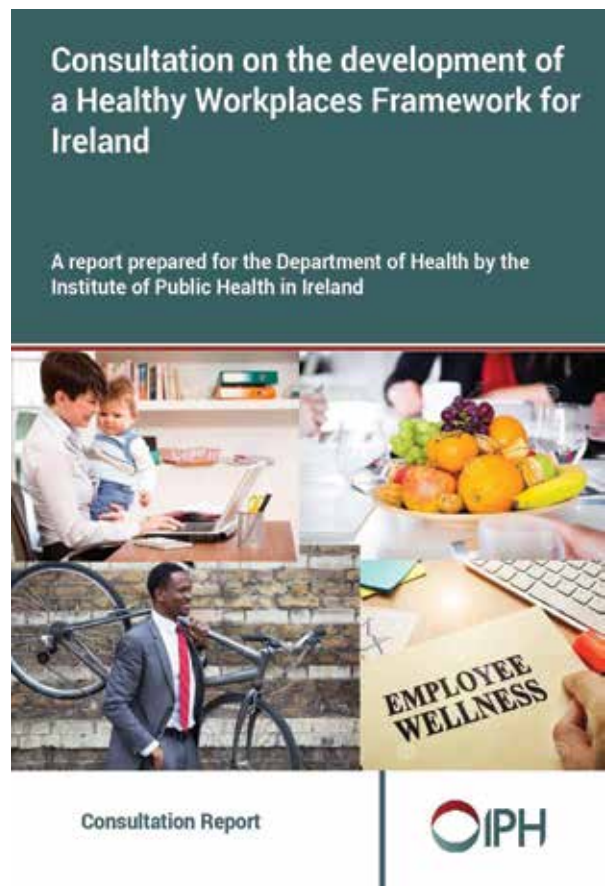
Meanwhile, the Health Research Board is also currently completing a literature review on Wellbeing and Culture, which is due to be completed later this year.

CONSULTATION REPORT

First published in April 2019, the consultation report on developing a Healthy Workplace Framework was prepared for the Department of Health by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH).

The Institute then facilitated the online consultation and hosted events in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Sligo, inviting stakeholders to share their views and experiences on creating a healthy workplace.

The consultation report was considered by the Department to inform the development of the Healthy Workplace Framework, which was due to be published in late 2019-early 2020. However, work on the framework had to be deferred, due to the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020. The framework aims to recognise and enhance existing initiatives, to facilitate the sharing of



To read the consultation report, prepared by the IPH for the Department of Health, visit bit.ly/3arDFqy.



For further information on the 'Keep Well Campaign', visit www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/healthy-ireland/

experience and learning, and also to provide the necessary supports and tools for organisations or companies who haven't yet developed their own resources.

The framework, which is under the umbrella of Healthy Ireland, is intended to provide a supportive, flexible, evidence-based structure that can be applied across all workplaces in Ireland regardless of their sector or size. The IPH is continuing to support the Department in the areas of policy design, implementation and monitoring.



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DCU COVID RESEARCH REVEALS FIRST RESPONDERS' CONCERNS



New research by Dublin City University on the experiences of pre-hospital first responders during the pandemic has found that contracting the virus and passing it to loved ones has been a primary source of worry for them. The DCU research team now hopes the findings will help inform the current response to Covid-19, risk management in the medium-term, and help build longer-term national resilience.

Funded as part of DCU's COVID-19 Research and Innovation Hub, the LISTEN project highlighted the experiences of first responders who had been completing testing, medical assessment and initial treatment of suspected COVID-19 cases across a range of settings.

It looked at levels of risk, impact and worry in relation to COVID-19, as well as the perception of preparedness and response, alongside their experience of staff safety, health and wellbeing.

A lack of facilities and the equipment needed for protection and sanitisation was found to cause distress to the first responders at the frontline of the pandemic.

A range of ethical dilemmas faced by them were also highlighted as part of the report, including having to bring people to hospitals while knowing this increased the risk of infection to the patient.



Firefighters who participated in the study were drawn largely from Dublin Fire Brigade, which delivers fire and ambulance services across the city.

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Respondents also felt conflicted by having to stop families from accompanying their loved ones to the hospital, knowing they may never see them again and decisions concerning ventilation and resuscitation were often challenging.

PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Despite this, a sense of duty and collegiality motivated first responders. The public outpouring of gratitude and community spirit were sources of strength and support to participants throughout the pandemic.

Trust in the government's leadership and guidance from the Chief Medical Officer Dr Tony Holohan also mitigated some of the stress and worry for these workers during the pandemic.

Speaking about the importance of the research and its findings, Prof Caroline McMullan, Professor of Business & Society at DCU Business School and the report's author, said: "This research records the voice of an often overlooked, yet critical element of the COVID-19 response and gives us all an opportunity to learn from their response.

"Notwithstanding all the worries, duties of care, ethical dilemmas and risks, first responders continued their work as pre-hospital healthcare professionals during the most unprecedented and challenging health emergency in the history of the state. The public's acknowledgement of their work reflects the outstanding debt owed by society to first responders during this pandemic."

The data was based on a sample of 815 responses, with the largest representation from the National Ambulance Service (accounting for just over 45% of respondents), followed by fire service personnel, drawn largely from Dublin Fire Brigade, which delivers fire and ambulance services for the city.

Responses were collected during the first response phase between 30 April and 17 May 2020, just before the restrictions were lifted.



The research highlights concerns faced by pre-hospital first responders during the pandemic – contracting the virus and passing it to loved ones was a primary source of worry for them.



KEY FINDINGS OF DCU RESEARCH REPORT

- 92% of respondents believe their occupation placed them at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 – largely due to regular contact with infected or asymptomatic patients.
- Contracting COVID-19 and passing it to loved ones was a primary source of worry for 82% of respondents.
- Duty of care to patients created tensions with the duty of care for first responders' families – especially around the increased risk of contracting COVID-19.
- A lack of facilities and issues with uniforms and PPE also caused distress.
- First responders faced a range of ethical dilemmas, including bringing people to hospitals while knowing this increased the risk of infection for patients.
- Decisions concerning ventilation and resuscitation were often challenging.
- Respondents felt conflicted by having to stop families from accompanying their loved ones to hospital, knowing they may never see their relatives again.
- Trust in the government's leadership and guidance from the Chief Medical Officer mitigated some of the stress and worry during the pandemic.
- A sense of duty and collegiality motivated first responders. The public outpouring of gratitude, and community spirit were sources of strength and support to participants throughout the pandemic.

PM GROUP WINS SUPREME SAFETY AWARD FOR SECOND TIME

The Supreme Safety Award winner for 2020 – PM Group – was announced during an online ceremony of the 29th NISO/NISG Annual Occupational Safety Awards in January, and made safety award history by becoming the first organisation to win the top prize two years in a row!



Managing the design, construction and commissioning of high-tech facilities, for over 48 years PM Group has built its expertise working for the world's leading pharma, food, data centre and medical technology companies.

On becoming the first organisation to win the Supreme Safety Award two years in a row, Dave Murphy, PM Group's Chief Executive Officer, said they were honoured to receive the top prize again for 2020 at the 29th NISO/NISG All Ireland Occupational Safety Awards.

Managing the design, construction and commissioning of high-tech facilities, for over 48 years PM Group has built its expertise working for the world's leading pharma, food, data centre and medical technology companies.

"The recognition of the Supreme Safety Award is really

important to our business which relies on achieving a consistent, excellent H&S performance. At PM Group we're committed to continual improvement of our health and safety performance, while our focus on health, safety and wellbeing is central to the continued growth of our business," noted Murphy.

"We are delighted to receive the Supreme Safety Award during a very challenging year for everyone in the construction industry. We are particularly pleased to be awarded for the second year in a row. The Award is recognition for the efforts put in by our teams in achieving our goal of improving the health, safety and wellbeing of our people and those who partner with us," he added.

According to David Tomlinson, PM Group's Head of Health & Safety, "Our partnership approach to health and safety



involves not just our teams but also our clients and project partners who play a key role in achieving these high standards.

“The feedback we receive as part of our award submission process plays an important part in the continual improvement of our health and safety performance.”

Sponsored by Irving Oil Whitegate Refinery, the Supreme Safety Award is presented to the organisation that has shown consistently good or continuously improving health and safety performance over a number of years, having played an outstanding contribution to occupational safety, health and welfare during the previous year.

VIRTUAL AWARD WINNERS

Highly valued and regarded among health and safety professionals throughout Ireland, the safety awards would, under normal circumstances, have been presented to the award winners during a prize-giving ceremony and gala dinner event in October 2020.

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the event took place online on 22 January.

It was supported by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI), Healthy Ireland and Irving Oil Whitegate Refinery.

Other awards presented included the Safety Representative of the Year Award 2020, in association with The CPL Institute.

Margaret Murphy from PricewaterhouseCoopers in Cork was the award winner for 2020, while the runner-up prize was jointly awarded to John White and Trevor Johnston from AA Ireland.

The Driving for Work Award was won for the second year in a row by KD Group. This award requires entrants to demonstrate evidence of policy, planning, practice, measuring performance and reviewing performance, in relation to driving for work.

The Healthy Workplace Award, supported by Healthy Ireland, was won by Alexion Ireland, in recognition of Alexion Ireland's commitment in promoting health and wellbeing as a core element of the health and safety agenda.

The Occupational Health Award, supported by the HSA and HSENI, was won jointly by the 2019 award winner Kiernan Structural Steel, and Vision Contracting Ltd.

The Gold Award was won by Designer Group, the Silver Award by Actavo and the Bronze Award by Weltec Engineering Ltd.

Actavo also won the Excellence in Safety Award, a new award which acknowledges organisations that achieve a high standard safety award for more than 15 continuous years.

Exceptional High Achiever Awards were presented to organisations who consistently achieved a high standard safety award for more than ten years, representing their continuous commitment to health and safety in their organisation.

Award recipients included Actavo, Colas Bitumen Emulsions (West) Ltd, Chemoran, Colas Contracting Ltd, Designer Group, Fingal County Council, John Sisk & Son (Holdings) Ltd, Jones Engineering Group, PM Group and TLI Group Ltd.

INNOVATIVE SAFETY MEASURES

The Minister of State for Business,

Employment and Retail, Damien English, TD, acknowledged the “tremendous work carried out by both NISO and NISG” in promoting the cause of better workplace health and safety. He noted that the awards acknowledge the “dedicated efforts of the winners to ensure that their places of work provide safety to all present”.

Minister English said the awards also “acknowledge the innovative ways that safety measures can be introduced without disrupting the operation of a business but also enhancing the work experience of employees”.

Dr Sharon McGuinness, CEO of the Health and Safety Authority, said that given the challenges everyone has had as a result of COVID this past year, “the event is a really great testament to those who are showing a continued importance of health and safety in the workplace, for businesses and workers alike”.

NISO President Harry Galvin announced the award winners from over 100 organisations around the island of Ireland, while NISG Chairperson Ashleigh Birkett, also addressed the award entrants and winners during the online awards ceremony.

Other special guest speakers who contributed to the online event included Robert Kidd, Chief Executive of the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI).

The 2020 awards, which served to demonstrate the positive and proactive culture of safety management in organisations, were supported by the HSA, HSENI, Healthy Ireland and Irving Oil Whitegate Refinery.

For further information and details of the NISO/NISG 2021 Awards (when they become available) simply email awards@niso.ie.

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MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS

A free new mental health service to support people working at the frontline during Covid-19 is being provided by turn2me – the first organisation in Ireland to provide professional mental health support services entirely online, with funding from Sláintecare.



Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly pictured with Brian Holohan, Clinical Manager, and Jennifer Griffin, General Manager, following the launch of the turn2me.ie service.

This instant messaging service is now available from mental health professionals for a wide range of frontline workers, from those working in the healthcare sector, the retail trade, to teachers and tradespeople.

Each group session is facilitated by a mental health professional and supported by trained volunteers. There are 20 groups available each week, with job specific groups available, as well as groups based on shared issues such as stress, burnout and maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Groups sessions are scheduled at different times each day throughout the week to accommodate shift workers, and participants can remain anonymous when online. The content and timings of the groups were developed following consultation and discussion with frontline workers from different disciplines.

FRONTLINE PEER SUPPORT

Launching the service late last year, Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly TD said that 2020 was difficult for everyone across the country. “While the majority of people were asked to stay at home, our frontline workers went to work. Among them were our healthcare professionals who acted selflessly, putting their own health at risk, in order to care for their patients. These experiences have taken a toll on many, which is why this online professional mental health service from turn2me is so important.”

Laura Magahy, Executive Director of Sláintecare, said: “One of the main goals of Sláintecare is to support innovative initiatives that help people engage in their own health and the stepped model of care provided by turn2me is a fantastic example.

“This new peer support service for frontline workers is a targeted initiative designed to support the people who have been to the forefront of maintaining all essential public services throughout the pandemic.”

Brian Holohan, Clinical Manager with turn2me, said: “Demand for our services has increased significantly. It has been challenging for everyone, especially for our frontline workers.

“Large evidence-base peer support, like the service we’re launching for frontline workers, is effective and can also act as a helpful gateway for people who haven’t reached out for help before. We have a team of mental health professionals and volunteers all over the country who are there to provide support. Help is at your fingertips 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.”

MAKING THAT FIRST STEP

As well as being facilitated by a mental health professional, peer support is an important part of the online model. Elaine O’ Donoghue from Kerry is a community builder volunteer with turn2me, and having worked as a teacher for more than 10 years she understands the pressures facing frontline workers.

She encourages anyone who identifies as a frontline worker and who is in need of support, to try the service. “Like many people, I struggle with my mental health sometimes and living in a rural part of Ireland I found it hard to find a service that was accessible.

“Making that first step to seek help can be hard but the anonymous nature of the service means that you can be completely honest and open, in a completely non-judgemental environment and there’s a real comfort in that when you’re feeling vulnerable or mentally unwell.

“Many frontline workers feel the need to maintain a brave face, and to act like they’re always confident and in control. Admitting you’re stressed or struggling can feel like a sign of weakness but it’s not. Talking to other people in the same situation can really help. There’s also the option to access professional counselling,” she said.

For further information visit <https://turn2me.ie>.



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FINAL YEAR OF HSA PROGRAMME OF WORK (2019-2021)

The Health and Safety Authority's Programme for Work 2021 sets out a range of strategic objectives, such as the pandemic response, measures of advice on the requirements of Brexit, and support of the Government's Remote Working Strategy, by promoting the HSA's range of advice, e-tools and supports available.

This year sees the start of the new trading and engagement model for Europe and Ireland with the UK. "In this regard, we will continue our activities in market surveillance of products coming into Ireland to ensure full compliance with all EU regulations within our mandate", according to Dr Sharon McGuinness, HAS Chief Executive Officer.

Dr McGuinness outlined the main priorities over the coming year in her foreword in the HSA Programme of Work for 2021. "We will actively engage in EU decision-making to ensure that Ireland and Irish interests continue to be met. We will continue to promote and advance the benefits of accreditation to companies, enterprises and regulators alike. We will publish our national accreditation strategy, taking into account the outcomes from the review of the Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB) completed in 2020."

At the start of the HSA's strategy in 2019, three priority sectors were identified – agriculture, construction and health and social care. "While COVID-19 has meant the focus and nature of our priorities and engagement in these sectors has changed, they still remain central to our programme of work," she added.

REMOTE WORKING STRATEGY

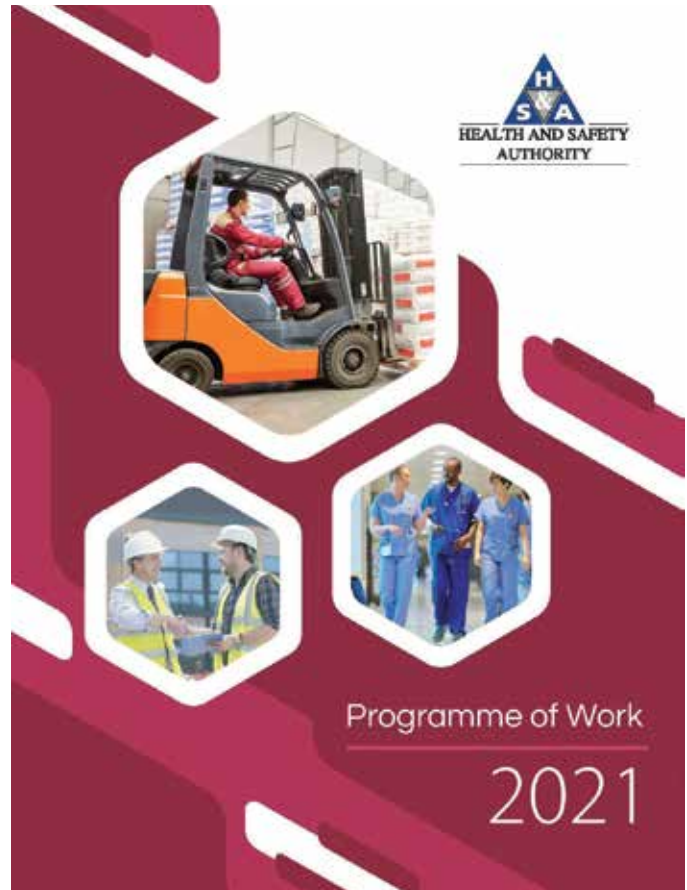
The HSA Chief Executive said that there will also be a focus on other sectors, such as meat and food processing as well as docks, transport and storage, arising from concerns related to COVID-19 and/or high numbers of fatalities and injuries.

The significant changes in the workplace in 2020 also brought a range of both opportunities and potential occupational health and safety hazards and concerns to the fore, she pointed out.

"We will continue to support the Government's Remote Working Strategy and promote the full range of advice, e-tools and supports that we have produced which workplaces can deploy to ensure their employees are supported physically and mentally to meet these changes."

On foot of the additional resources allocated by the government, she said that the Authority will implement a comprehensive recruitment process, as well as reviewing their operating model to determine the best use of these additional resources.

"This review, together with a transformation of our



To download the HSA Programme of Work for 2021 visit www.hsa.ie

business systems that commenced in 2020, will ensure that the Authority is ready and able to meet the demands and expectations placed on us. We look forward to concluding deliverables for this year's strategy and, together with the Board, we will present our next Strategy Statement for 2022-2024."

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Authority will continue to support the Government in its efforts to ensure measures are put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace, and will provide occupational health and safety (OSH) advice and COVID-19 supports to employers and workers through its Workplace Contact Unit and online advice along with inspections of workplaces.

Public health will also be supported in all investigations and controls of COVID-19 outbreaks in the workplace. In addition, the HSA will support the development and implementation of any legislation that is published to address requirements on COVID, including the Biological Agents Regulation and associated Code of Practice.

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BREXIT REQUIREMENTS

In 2021, the Authority will continue to support and advise businesses as they work to meet EU regulatory requirements and product standards in the new trading regime between Europe and the UK.

In relation to market surveillance of products coming into Ireland, the Authority will address compliance with all EU regulations within its mandate through inspections and product checks.

PRIORITY SECTORS

The Authority will continue to focus on the three priority sectors identified under the strategy – agriculture, construction, and health and social care. Prior to the pandemic, the Authority had identified the key hazards associated with each sector and drafted plans to address these through specific actions under the regulate, promote and influence strategic objectives. In 2021 all promotion, prevention and enforcement activities will be targeted towards sectors which have the highest public health and occupational health and safety risks.

BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE SUPPORT

HSA will continue to provide supports and advice to employers and workers through its Workplace Contact Unit, Chemicals Helpdesk, website, publications and e-tools such as HSALearning, BeSMART and Work PositiveCI to enable them to meet their workplace occupational health and safety obligations.

LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

The development of any COVID-19 required changes to OSH legislation will be supported by the Authority, to ensure they are implemented as appropriate. The HSA recently issued technical guidance (Technical Land Use Planning Advice) for planning authorities and operators of COMAH establishments on the control of new planning developments at, and within the vicinity of, qualifying COMAH establishments.

REMOTE WORKING STRATEGY

The HSA will continue to support the Government's Remote Working Strategy and other initiatives to ensure OSH standards are maintained, as the world of work has changed due to COVID-19. It also aims to fulfil the Competent Authority (CA) functions across a range of areas including machinery, lifts, PPE, ATEX, ADR road transport, Transportable Pressure Equipment (TPE), chemicals (REACH, COMAH, CLP, Detergents, Export-Import, Market Surveillance, Dangerous Substances) through

engagement with other competent authorities, in addition to the provision of technical advice, approvals and inspections.

EU POLICY INPUT

The HSA aims to make the most effective use of its resources in contributing to EU committees and working groups in the development of policies relating to OSH, Chemicals, Market Surveillance and Accreditation. It will continue to seek opportunities to assume a lead role in specific committees and working groups prioritised in line with our national and strategic interests.

NEW ACCREDITATION AREAS

The programme of work for accreditation in 2021 will continue to focus on awarding new accreditations and monitoring conformance of the existing accreditations of the 231 clients in the Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB) programme. It is intended to develop a further three new areas of accreditation, which will result in eight new areas of accreditation available by the end of the current strategy cycle.

The national accreditation strategy will conclude with a focus on commencing implementation in 2021. INAB will continue to provide support and expert advice across government on conformity assessment and the impact of the UK exit and will also support Irish business to trade in the new European and UK trading model.

In 2021, INAB will extend its international recognition for personnel certification and prepare for a full onsite evaluation in 2022, further extending the Authority's recognition for the EU's Emissions Trading Scheme.

The Minister and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) will also be supported by the HSA in the development of policy and legislative proposals relating to COVID-19, OSH, chemicals and market surveillance at national, European and international levels.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

This year the HSA Strategy Statement for 2022-24 will be submitted to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, following consultation with the Board, stakeholders and staff.

The Authority will continue to prioritise Project IRIS, the technology and business transformation programme and implement the Risk Management Framework, which was finalised in 2020. And it anticipates a high level of recruitment and staff training and development due to additional resources sanctioned.



"While COVID-19 has meant the focus and nature of our priorities and engagement in agriculture, construction and health and social care has changed, they remain central to our programme of work" – Dr Sharon McGuinness, HSA Chief Executive

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SURVEY RESPONDENTS VENT CONCERN OVER POOR AIR QUALITY

Proper air quality and ventilation in the workplace is crucial in helping to prevent serious health issues, including the transmission of Covid-19 and other respiratory viruses. However, over 50% of respondents to a nationwide survey by Eirdata, in conjunction with Engineers Ireland, rated indoor air quality and ventilation in their organisations as 'poor' or 'average'.

With indoor air quality recognised as an integral contributing factor towards employee wellness, health and safety, Eirdata were keen to gather valuable market intelligence and insights to the current issues and trends.

Eirdata – specialists in cleanroom validation, commissioning and compliance, HVAC systems, indoor air quality and building wellness – surveyed their client companies and the 24,000 members of Engineers Ireland.

"Over 75% of respondents believe that indoor air quality and ventilation is 'important' or 'very important' in their organisation. However, our results show that nearly 50% of those surveyed have not even had a discussion on how to ensure their workplaces are safe," noted Bernard Yore, CEO of ESS Group (Eirdata Ltd & ESS Ltd).

Commenting on the survey's findings, he said the fact that over half the number of respondents (53%) rated their indoor air quality and ventilation as 'poor' or 'average' was very worrying, not just from a Covid-19 perspective but also from an individual's wellbeing.

"A simple part of the solution is to



Tommy Rice, Eirdata's General Manager pictured with Bernard Yore, CEO of ESS Group (Eirdata Ltd & ESS Ltd) at the launch of Eirdata's nationwide survey in conjunction with Engineers Ireland.

increase ventilation in order to lower the concentrations of indoor air pollutants or contaminants including any viruses that may be in the air. Keep windows open if possible to allow outdoor air coming indoors," Yore noted.

INDOOR AIR QUALITY SENSORS

"Whilst increasing ventilation is not enough to protect people from Covid-19 or any other respiratory disease, it is a simple tool, when used along with other best practices – it can reduce the risk. Also monitoring indoor air quality at least twice a year and preferably continually using sensors is a quick, inexpensive part of the

solution," he added.

"It's very encouraging to see that 93% agree Indoor Air Quality sensors are useful devices to help assess whether adequate ventilation is provided and will measure the air quality, as it relates to the health and comfort of the building occupants. The sensors are small and can easily fit unobtrusively within any room or office area and remote monitoring is simple."

However, failure to adequately ventilate to reduce build-up of dangerous indoor air pollutants can lead to a range of serious health issues, he pointed out. "The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Air Quality Report for 2019 estimated that 1,300 people prematurely die each year in Ireland due to poor air quality.

"It has short-term health implications such as headaches, breathing difficulties and eye irritation, while long-term effects include asthma, reduced liver function or cardiovascular disease."

Yore now urges all organisations to check the ventilation in their workplaces. "As experts in air quality, we know that if you look after the wellness of your building, this in turn will contribute to the good health and wellbeing of your team in the long-term."

The core activity of companies targeted by this survey included civil, chemical, mechanical, technology, pharma and life sciences, and electrical engineering. Directors, managers and senior and junior engineers represented 77% of survey respondents.



Eirdata specialises in cleanroom validation, commissioning and compliance, HVAC Systems, indoor air quality and building wellness, and provide these services primarily to the pharmaceutical, medical devices and healthcare sectors. For further information visit www.eirdata.ie.

IOSH RESEARCH ON RETURNING TO WORK AFTER MENTAL ILLNESS

A new research study, commissioned by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) into workers' mental health problems, has called on employers to take greater account of an individual's needs, and emphasises the need for more tailored approaches when planning a return to work by their employees.

Researchers from Tilburg University in the Netherlands conducted the study, on behalf of IOSH, to gain a better understanding of individual variability in the return-to-work process for employees on sick leave due to poor mental health.

Having identified a range of trajectories that workers with mental health problems go through as part of their return to work – with some able to return quicker than others – the study emphasises the need for more tailored approaches.

"Considering an estimated 12.8 billion working days of productivity are lost globally, due to anxiety and depression, these are useful findings and insights," according to IOSH Research Manager Mary Ogunbeje.

"With the costs to society of absenteeism, presenteeism and unemployment due to mental health problems, the study attempts to get a better understanding of individual variations and the return-to-work process," she added.

Such attention to individual situations and conditions, the research suggests, could not only help prevent mental health problems from becoming more severe but also help employees achieve a more sustainable return to the workplace.

"The imperative to better understand the individual needs of those returning to work after experiencing mental health problems is likely to get even sharper focus over the coming months, of course, as employees worldwide re-enter the workplace after coronavirus lockdown," the IOSH Research Manager noted.

"Many of these workers have been living with stress and social isolation as they continue to work at home and away from their 'normal' working environment."

HOPE AND PERSPECTIVE

The research also stresses the importance of giving hope and perspective to employees currently on sick leave with mental health problems. The study suggests that individuals will benefit from more frequent communication with their employer and more joined-up support from co-workers, stakeholders and the wider community. This includes tackling the stigma that can often be attached to mental health problems.

The study also observed that nearly half the number of those missing from the workplace, due to their mental health, return to work within four to five months on average. And it notes there is only a small chance of relapse during the return-to-work process. The differences as to how quickly the other half finds their way back into employment are wide.

Faster return-to-work trajectories were found to include



The need to better understand individual needs of those returning to work after experiencing mental health problems will come into sharper focus over the coming months due to the pandemic.

more employees with stress complaints and adjustment disorders, while slower trajectories featured more employees with burnout. These findings suggest timely interventions may prevent the development of more severe mental health problems and longer return-to-work trajectories.

A further finding showed that relapse in workers who had returned to the workplace from a mental health problem was more likely to be influenced by work or psychosocial factors. Trajectories, with or without relapse, did not vary with the type of mental health problem, the size of the organisation or demographical factors.

"With such significant societal costs associated with mental health problems, not to mention people's quality of life, we need more insight into how employees who have these issues return to work and a greater understanding of the different ways individuals negotiate this process," said Dr Margot Joosen, Senior Researcher at Tranzo, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences and leader of the research study team.

For further information on the IOSH research visit www.iosh.com/rtwmentalhealth

MESSINGER TO STEP DOWN AS IOSH CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Bev Messinger, Chief Executive of IOSH (the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health) will retire from her role this summer, after four and a half years at the helm.

During that time she has overseen the successful implementation of IOSH's five-year strategy, 'WORK 2022 – Shaping the Future of Safety and Health', and she has initiated and led a comprehensive and successful transformation programme.

Since October 2016, Messinger had taken IOSH from a UK-focused membership organisation with a financial deficit in danger of not meeting its charitable objects to a purposeful and internationally respected professional body serving over 47,000 members spanning almost every sector across 130 countries.

"This year is the right time to pursue long-held plans to develop a non-exec portfolio which I had postponed to lead IOSH through the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. I couldn't be prouder of the hard work everyone at IOSH has done to take us on the journey from where we were in 2016 to the stronger position we're in now," she noted recently.

Dr Bill Gunnyeon, outgoing Chair of the IOSH Board of Trustees, outlined how Bev Messinger had established effective leadership and governance, focused business strategy and ambitions, created greater efficiency, correct resourcing, robust internal processes and better communications "that have all improved IOSH's performance in line with its strategic objectives and members' needs".

Throughout the pandemic, Messinger and her team continued to deliver key projects to achieve planned

improvements for its members worldwide. IOSH also worked with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and others to create Covid-19 advice and guidance. It has provided 30 free webinars on safe and healthy work, attracting over 22,000 attendees from more than 100 countries.

"If Covid-19 has shown anything, it's that looking after the wellbeing of people is the key to resilient and effective organisations and a better, more sustainable world," Messinger pointed out.



MAIN PRIORITIES OF NEW IOSH PRESIDENT

The new IOSH President said the organisation will be "right behind its members and the businesses they work for" as they continue to adapt to new ways of working.



James Quinn, Senior Health and Safety Manager for Multiplex in the UK, said that with the Covid-19 pandemic causing uncertainty, businesses are turning to safety and health professionals as they seek to protect their people and their futures.

Quinn, who succeeded Dr Andrew Sharman, added that as organisations around the world attempt to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, some are facing resurgences and localised lockdowns.

"One key focus for them is to ensure they keep their people safe – managing the risks of Covid transmission and all other safety and health risks. Business leaders are turning to safety and health professionals to ensure they can navigate their way through this turbulent time. They want to ensure that they can protect their people and protect their business."

From the outset of the pandemic, IOSH has provided support for its members around the world, which has included the Future Leaders Programme, a competency framework, a mentoring platform, an online resource and career hub, in addition to hosting regular webinars.

The new IOSH President said to ensure the profession supports businesses into the future, it is crucial to continue the recruitment of high calibre of people, something he is keen to focus on during his presidential year.

An army veteran of two-and-a-half decades, James Quinn said the support he received from IOSH and some of its members when he changed career was invaluable. After leaving the Armed Forces, he joined Babcock International PLC as a Health, Safety and Environment Trainer, then Advisor, before becoming Health and Safety Manager for a large Middle East transport group. He is now Senior Health and Safety Manager for Multiplex in the UK.

EU-OSHA CAMPAIGN TO ‘LIGHTEN THE LOAD’ ON WORKPLACE MSDs

‘Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load’ – the latest two-year campaign rolled out by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) – is focussing on musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), which remain the most prevalent work-related problem.

The two-year programme of events and actions (2020-2022) aims to raise awareness of the most prevalent work-related health issue, and to ensure the best possible work environment for the health and wellbeing of the workforce, and duty of all employers.

Despite legislation and initiatives aimed at preventing musculoskeletal disorders, around three in every five workers suffer from MSDs, and the disorder remains the most common work-related health complaint in Europe, affecting workers in all jobs and sectors.

Repetitive movements, prolonged sitting and heavy lifting are just some of the risk factors that contribute to these conditions, which can affect the muscles, joints, tendons or bones. The negative impact that they have on workers’ quality of life is clear.

Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, said the Commission fully supports the EU-OSHA campaign to tackle the issue of work-related musculoskeletal disorders. “Many of us have experienced backache, stiff muscles or a sore neck as a result of our work. This can severely affect our everyday lives, our productivity, and it can be detrimental to our physical and mental health,” he noted.

Christa Sedlatschek, EU-OSHA Executive Director, emphasised that in addition to the human suffering caused, workers miss out on the fulfilling aspects of their private and working lives.

“Workers with MSDs are absent from work more often and for longer periods, are likely to be less productive while at work and often take early retirement. This campaign will highlight that early intervention and rehabilitation are vital and entirely possible. By working together and adopting good practice now, we can prevent MSDs in future generations of workers,” she added.

FOCUS ON HIGH-RISK SECTORS

Measures to prevent and manage MSDs are often simple and inexpensive, and this is one of the key messages of the campaign, which is reaching out to workers and employers across all sectors, with a particular focus on high-risk sectors, such as healthcare and early education.

Supporting workers with chronic MSDs to remain in work will also be a key focus, along with the need to consider psychosocial risks and worker diversity, and to adopt collaborative approaches to MSD management – involving workers, employers, healthcare providers and other stakeholders.

Special attention will be given to emerging risks, arising from digitalisation and new technologies and ways of organising work. This is particularly timely in light of COVID-19, which has



European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit pictured at a press conference to announce the launch of the campaign in October 2020.

forced many workers out of offices and into working from home. MSDs and home-based teleworking is now a priority area for the campaign.

SIX MAIN OBJECTIVES

Co-ordinated by EU-OSHA's national focal points, official campaign partners, media partners and the Enterprise Europe Network the campaign has six main objectives:

- To raise awareness of the importance of preventing MSDs by providing facts and figures on exposure to MSDs and their impact on individuals, businesses and society;
- To promote risk assessment and the proactive management of MSDs by providing access to relevant tools, guidance, and audio-visual and other support materials;
- To show that MSDs are an issue for everyone but can be successfully tackled;
- To improve knowledge of new and emerging MSD risk factors;
- To promote the importance of supporting workers with chronic MSDs to be reintegrated into and to remain in the workplace, and demonstrate how this can be achieved;
- To encourage effective collaboration by bringing different stakeholders together and facilitating the exchange of information and good practice.

Campaign highlights include the European Weeks for Safety and Health at Work (October 2020, 2021 and 2022), a Good Practice Exchange event in March 2022, and the Good Practice Awards Ceremony and Healthy Workplaces Summit in November 2022.

For further information visit <https://healthy-workplaces.eu/en>

EUROFOUND E-SURVEY ON LIVING, WORKING AND COVID-19

Eurofound's third round of its online survey aims to capture the far-reaching implications of the pandemic for the way people live and work across Europe.

Two rounds of the survey have been carried out to date – one in April 2020, when most member states were in lockdown, and one in July, when society and economies were slowly re-opening. The third round was launched on 15 February and will remain open until 29 March.

To capture new developments, this third round of the Eurofound survey also includes new questions about how people think about the vaccination programmes and the quality and use of public services in pandemic times.

Covid-19 is having a profound impact, with far-reaching implications for the way people live and work across Europe and the globe.

To mitigate the impact of the pandemic, EU member states have introduced a range of measures, while there also has

been a huge increase in the uptake of telework and other e-services.

For more information visit www.eurofound.europa.eu.



EU STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK (2021-2027) ON HEALTH & SAFETY AT WORK

Public consultation on the European Commission's Strategic Framework for Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) for 2021-2027, which builds on the EU Strategic Framework (2014-2020) is due to close on 1 March.

The Commission's new strategic framework aims to maintain and improve the high health and safety standards for EU workers in light of the COVID-19 crisis, which has highlighted the crucial importance of health, including occupational health and safety, to help to prepare for new crises

and threats.

It will also identify key objectives and set out a strategic framework to encourage EU countries and stakeholders to work together on common priorities. As part of its 2021 work programme, the European Commission will bring forward a new European Union OSH Strategic Framework.

The Commission is seeking, in particular, the views from national or regional public authorities, employers and their business and professional

associations, workers and their organisations, other EU institutions, organisations and citizens with an interest or expertise in the field.

These include academics, research institutes, EU agencies, OHS professionals, public and private insurance organisations and non-governmental organisations.

The information and opinions collected will be used to take stock of the current EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety. At the same time it will also provide input to prepare and improve the new one for 2021-2027.

EU Strategic Framework (2021-2027) Health & Safety at Work



For more information click on <https://bit.ly/2ZIPJTK>





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ITALY: MORE THAN €211M TO SUPPORT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY

Announcing a €211.2m package to support companies that invest in occupational risk prevention, (the Italian Workers' Compensation Authority) noted: "we must not let our guard down so that the health emergency does not make us forget occupational health and safety".

The funds to be allocated this year will be distributed according to regions and provinces and follow four funding axes:

- €94.2m for investment projects and €2m aimed at adopting organisational and social responsibility models.
- €45m for projects to reduce the risk of manual handling of loads
- €60m for projects to recycle asbestos-containing materials
- €10m for micro and small enterprises operating in the mobile manufacturing and fishing sectors.

The beneficiaries of this funding are companies and self-employed people registered at the Chamber of Commerce. Another allocation is reserved for micro and small enterprises in agriculture (Isi Agricoltura 2019-2020).

"In order to optimise the use of the allocated funds, to increase the involvement of businesses and to speed up the disbursement of funds, we have simplified the formalities for businesses and defined in more detail the interventions that can be supported," explained Bettoni.

Applications are only made online, following a multi-stage procedure. The capital grant, calculated on expenditure considered eligible excluding VAT, can cover up to 65% of the expenditure incurred by the company. This represents a maximum of €130,000 for eligible projects under Axis 1 to 3 and €50,000 for those under Axis 4.



Franco Bettoni, President of INAIL

This allocation, in place every year since 2010, is "unique in Europe", and it has already enabled the implementation of 32,000 projects, he added.

SWEDEN: SURVEY REVEALS EMPLOYEES SUFFER FROM HEAVY WORKLOAD

Six out of ten employees in Sweden say their workload is far too heavy, according to the main findings of a survey report on how employees experience their work environment.

The Swedish Working Environment Authority, who conducted 7,000 telephone interviews between autumn 2019 and spring 2020 as part of its biennial surveys, highlights the following data in particular:

- 64% of respondents feel that they have too much work and too much to do.
- 23% feel they are under pressure, with high demands and little autonomy in their work.
- 19% say they have been exposed to air pollution for at least a quarter of their working time.
- 72% believe they have interesting and challenging work.
- 13% report having been exposed to violence or threats of violence at work at least once in the past year.
- 11% of women and 2% of men report having been victims of sexual harassment at work in the past year.

According to Erna Zelmin-Ekenhem, Director General of the Swedish Working Environment Authority, "The problems of stress and lack of autonomy are not new, but they are intensifying with the pandemic."

The survey found that one in three employees in the healthcare and education sectors – predominantly female – says their work is psychologically demanding. He/she is not able to think about anything but work, not having time for lunch and not being able to influence the organisation of work and when it should be done.



"These are all known stress factors that can lead to psychosocial problems. Nobody should have to get sick, get injured or die because of their work. As far as workplace violence is concerned, employers have a great responsibility to prevent vulnerable situations and to support employees," she noted.

FRANCE: ANNUAL REPORT OF OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES INSURANCE

An increasing number of workplace accidents, in addition to priority prevention programmes, have been highlighted in 'Key features of 2019 health and safety in the workplace' by French National Insurance against occupational injuries.

With 655,715 new claims recognised the number of accidents at work increased slightly by 0.6% in 2019 compared to 2018, while the frequency (33.5 accidents at work per 1,000 employees) was slightly lower than in 2018.

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) accounted for 88% of occupational diseases in 2019, asbestos-related diseases were stabilised, while work-related mental diseases and diseases related to crystalline silica increased (+6% and +13.9% respectively).

A new procedure for recognition of accidents at work and occupational diseases, which came into effect in December 2019, clarifies the different steps, simplifies understanding for both the worker and the enterprise, and reduces processing times.

In 2019, the French National Insurance against occupational injuries developed three priority programmes to prevent MSDs, chemical hazards and falls in the construction industry, which are responsible for the majority of accidents at work or occupational diseases.

In addition, it has offered companies with fewer than 50 employees an innovative system of subsidies that can be used to purchase equipment, training or solutions to prevent the most common risks.

The 'Covid Prevention' subsidy from the Health Insurance – Occupational Risks aims to help companies with fewer than 50 employees as well as the self-employed to finance up to 50% of their investment in equipment to protect against SARS-CoV-2.

GLOBAL COALITION 'WISH' TO PROMOTE WOMEN IN HEALTH AND SAFETY SECTOR

Leading safety and health professionals across the world have joined together to form 1WISH – the Global Coalition of Women in Safety and Health – to promote inclusion across the health and safety profession.

The coalition aims to forge positive, productive links between the various health and safety networks around the globe, and to bring about positive change and support better communication about the role and inclusion of women and other minority groups in the industry.

The coalition is supported fully by volunteers. By bringing together prominent leaders, inclusion pioneers and influencers at the forefront of new thinking on health and safety, the coalition is creating a knowledge bank 'greater than the sum of its parts'.

Anne Gardner-Aston, chair of 1WISH, comments: "Women have so much to offer in the health and safety sector, but they are often overlooked or struggle to get their voices heard. The members of our coalition will be working together to communicate and support each other in order to find solutions to common issues.

She notes that important work is being undertaken by women in safety networks around the world. "Without seeking to direct the work of these organisations, we are working together globally to uplift, support and share experiences with the aim of achieving greater diversity and inclusion within the profession."

Louise Hosking, co-founder of 1WISH, expands: "Through this coalition we aim to create new opportunities and greater



For further details on the conference in March visit <https://hseuk.co.uk/women-in-safety/>.

visibility via these networks, particularly showcasing the work of underrepresented groups.

"We want to promote creativity, innovation and mentoring in our industry by combining our skills and knowledge in order to assist career development. The coalition also includes emerging networks from countries with less established regulatory frameworks or with specific challenges from whom all members can learn."

The coalition's inaugural congress will be held in partnership with HSE Global Series virtually on 9 March, to coincide with International Women's Day, using the theme **#ChooseToChallenge**. A further congress planned for the autumn will focus on inclusion.

LABOUR CALLS FOR REFORM OF SCOTTISH WORK INJURIES SCHEME



Central Scotland MSP Mark Griffin is proposing a Member's Bill calling for Covid-19 infections in the workplace to be classed as 'an occupational disease'.

The UK industrial injuries scheme is not protecting workers from developing occupational diseases including Covid-19, according to the Labour members of the Scottish Parliament.

Labour is calling for Scotland to introduce its own, more comprehensive scheme. Central Scotland MSP Mark Griffin now intends to propose a Member's Bill calling for Covid-19 infections in the workplace to be classed as 'an occupational disease'.

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) statistics reveal that up to December 2020 employers in Scotland made over 1,350 reports of workers contracting the virus in their workplaces.

It has been acknowledged there is massive under-reporting of cases. Griffin noted that reform of Scotland's industrial injuries support system was long overdue before the pandemic, adding that the scale of the damage done by Covid-19 has made that reform a matter of urgency.

"Coronavirus has ripped through workplaces across Scotland, exposing thousands to the virus and tragically leading to deaths. These numbers are just the tip of the iceberg," he added.

The proposals would also see the creation of a Scottish Employment Injuries Advisory Council and measures to tackle the gender gap of people seeking support. The Bill would also modernise industrial injury social security support.

MEDICS CLAIM ACTION IS NEEDED AS COVID HITS NHS WORKFORCE

The number of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers who are falling ill with Covid-19 has reached crisis levels and is seriously hampering the fight against the rapidly escalating pandemic, the British Medical Association (BMA) has warned.

The problem of staff absence, due to illness or the need to self-isolate when family members test positive, is also beginning to hamper the vaccination programme.

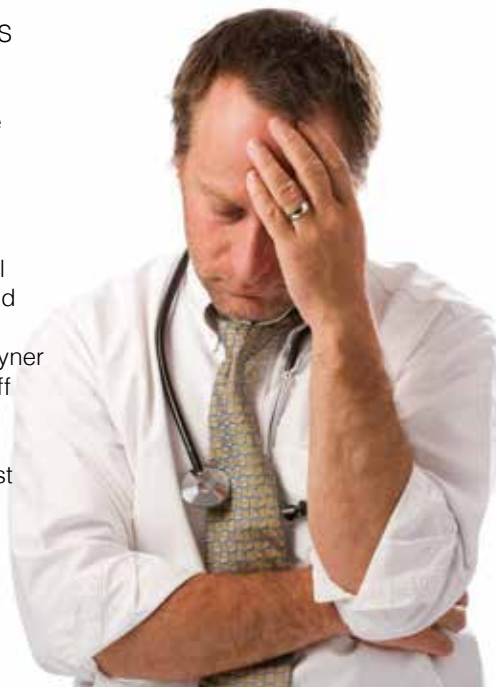
In a letter to members, BMA chair Chaand Nagpaul noted: "There are over 46,000 hospital staff off sick with Covid-19, heaping additional pressure on an already overstretched workforce struggling to manage even current critical care demand."

Stressing the need for all doctors and other health workers to be vaccinated as soon as possible, Dr

Nagpaul added: "It is only if the NHS workforce is kept fit and well, can we meet the unprecedented surge in demand, as well as delivering the vaccine programme, which remains our only hope to end this dreadful pandemic."

Transport, education and retail unions have also called for essential workers in these sectors to be added to the priority list for vaccinations. Labour's Deputy Leader Angela Rayner has called on employers to give staff paid time-off to get the vaccine.

She has written to the following five main business groups to request that they aid the process of workers getting the jab – the Confederation of Business Industry, the British Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, the Institute of Directors and MakeUK.



PRAISE FOR UNION'S 'UNSUNG HEALTH AND SAFETY HEROES'

The head of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) has praised the country's 'unsung health and safety heroes' noting that "2020 has arguably been the most challenging year ever for workplace health and safety reps.

"Up and down the country, health and safety workplace reps have had their work cut out for them. Facing a deadly virus, with scarce early support from governments, health and safety reps have risen to the occasion in deeply challenging circumstances," stated Roz Foyer, STUC General Secretary (pictured right).

The Scottish trade union leader added that strong health and safety practices have never been so important. "Last year starkly exposed the fact that bad working conditions kill. The STUC has long stated that when levels of coronavirus are high, we should be in lockdown and non-essential workplaces should close.

"However, when cases are low, and places begin to re-open, health and safety in the workplace is absolutely paramount to control the virus. As we reflect on the past year, we must recognise the importance of decent health and safety, and the hard work of health and safety reps that hold

employers to account and make all of us safer."

The union body had earlier called on the Scottish Government to adopt "a cautious approach" in response

to concerns about the fast spread of a new coronavirus strain, with closure of non-essential workplaces in sectors including construction and manufacturing.



DISBELIEF AT HSE CLAIMS THAT COVID IS NOT A 'SERIOUS' WORK RISK

The assessment by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) that Covid-19 is not a "serious" workplace risk has been described as "beyond belief" by Labour's Shadow Employment Secretary.

The UK safety regulator has three risk categories – serious, significant and minor. In responding to a question on the Covid-19 ranking from Labour's Shadow Employment Secretary



Labour's Shadow Employment Secretary Andy McDonald claims the HSE's assessment that the virus is not a serious work risk is "beyond belief".

Andy McDonald, Employment Minister Mims Davies, admitted in a written statement that: "the HSE has decided the category 'significant' in the EMM [Enforcement Management Model] table best supports inspectors in making sensible, proportionate regulatory decisions.

"The definition is that the effects are non-permanent or reversible, non-progressive and any disability is temporary. This definition refers to the likely response of the working population as a whole, not taking account of individuals with a particular resistance or susceptibility."

The HSE has received 134,000 complaints related to Covid concerns since the start of the pandemic, but issued just 192 enforcement notices and has taken no prosecutions.

Commenting on Minister Davies' response to his written question, Labour's Andy McDonald said: "Given that almost 113,000 people have died from Covid-19 and as many as one in five people are suffering from the effects of 'long Covid,' it is beyond belief that the government does not consider the virus to be a serious risk to working people."

McDonald added: "With workplace health and safety enforcement almost non-existent and after a decade of cuts that has left agencies under-resourced, the government must urgently re-categorise Covid-19 as a serious risk and bring in new safety rules and enforcement to protect workers' lives."

ALMOST ONE THIRD OF NHS WORKERS HAVE CONTRACTED COVID

Almost one third of all National Health Service (NHS) staff have had the coronavirus, according to the findings of a survey by GMB – the UK's general trade union, which has more than 631,000 members.

GMB members work in sectors ranging from retail, security, schools, distribution, utilities to social care, the NHS, ambulance service and local government. The union's survey included more than 1,600 ambulance workers and found 37 per cent of these have had coronavirus – with a 'massive' 84 per cent of them saying they caught it while on the job.

Almost 30 per cent of ambulance workers who had Covid said their symptoms were 'really bad' or 'required medical attention'. GMB's survey of over 3,506 workers across the NHS workforce found 30 per cent reported they had caught the coronavirus, with almost 60 per cent saying they passed it to a family member.

The GMB said it is clear that poor PPE is to blame, and has called on the UK Government and Public Health

England to urgently review PPE guidance for health workers. The union said ambulance workers report having to attend patients with flimsy gowns instead of proper PPE, while hospital nurses working amongst Covid-19 patients say they are given only the most basic of surgical masks. And the union has also found that hospital trusts are not isolating and testing patients efficiently.

GMB's National Officer Rachel Harrison said: "Our health workers are dropping like flies – yet the government

and Public Health England still won't give them proper FFP (Filtering Face Piece) Level 3 protection. We're a year into the pandemic – this is a disgrace.

"Our paramedics, technicians and practitioners are expected to treat suspected coronavirus patients with nothing but a flimsy mask and a plastic apron. GMB has called for guidance to be reviewed since the start of the pandemic and unless ministers sit up and take notice, our health service will be overwhelmed," she added.



The union's survey of more than 1,600 ambulance workers found 37 per cent of them have had coronavirus.

UNION CLAIMS CARE STAFF FACE VACCINE ‘STRONG-ARM TACTICS’

The UK Government must take action against care homes refusing to employ staff hesitant about having the Covid vaccine, or intimidating others into having the injection by linking it to pay and employment, according to public service union UNISON.

If the vaccine programme is to work properly and maximum take-up across the social care sector, individuals should be encouraged, not intimidated, into receiving a jab, the union said. It has written to Care Minister Helen Whately calling for the government to intervene.

This heavy-handed approach is the opposite of what is needed to encourage the maximum number of care workers to come forward for the vaccine, said UNISON. It is urging all care companies to adopt a similar voluntary approach to that being used across the NHS.

UNISON General Secretary Christina McAnea said: “The vaccination programme is the way out of this health crisis. The more care workers who get a jab, the safer the sector will be. However, care employers who put punitive measures in place for staff, or make it a condition of work, are undermining trust and confidence in the vaccine.

“They are also at odds with the sensible approach being



taken by most employers and the NHS. Companies would do better to concentrate on informing staff about the benefits of the vaccination, rather than intimidating them.”

GRANT AID FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH ON CONSTRUCTION

The Occupational Health Research Award offers grant aid of £25,000 for UK-based academics, researchers and organisations to enable them carry out studies aimed at improving the occupational health of people in construction.

With the winner of the Occupational Health Research Award for 2020-21 to be announced at the end of March, applications for next year’s award scheme, which is organised by B&CE Charitable Trust, are scheduled to reopen in November.

Academics, researchers and organisations will have the opportunity to bid for £25,000 towards their studies, as part of the Occupational Health Research Award for 2021/22.

The Trust wants to hear from charities with a focus on occupational health, accredited research organisations and occupational health practitioners who wish to:

- Make a significant difference to the health-at-work of construction workers
- Help tackle occupational health issues in construction
- Help make an important scientific contribution to the construction industry

The annual award, which offers the opportunity to apply for grant aid towards research into improving health-at-work for people in construction, has previously funded research at universities across the UK.

The University of Lincoln won the 2019/20 Occupational Health Research Award to fund research around the issue of occupational stress within the construction industry. The research has been delayed by the coronavirus pandemic, yet project leader Dr Saad Sarhan said he has made good progress analysing published research that has been conducted into a problem costing the UK economy an estimated £5bn plus a year.

Over the coming months Dr Sarhan is planning to interview 30 construction employees from across the industry about how stress impacts both them and their work, ahead of the publication of the report in August 2021.

Prof Stephen Pretlove from the University of Lincoln hopes the initial research by his colleague will lead to bigger things. “We see this study as potentially being a pilot project for a significantly larger project as it has already identified the significant size and scale of the problem,” he said.





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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE PROJECT TO PROBE WORK STRESS

Pandemic and rapid transition to remote working have further increased stress levels and burnout in the world of work. An international project is now examining the possibilities of using artificial intelligence for early detection of work-related stress and is conversely developing new tools to support well-being at work.

According to the 2019 Working Life Barometer of Finland's Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, one out of three wage and salary earners suffer from mental exhaustion.

The exhaustion is caused by prolonged work stress, which may be related to the work itself or its content, negative interaction at the workplace, or the working environment.

In remote work, for example, the lack of contacts, the continuous succession of remote meetings, poor ergonomics and disturbances in the working environment may increase stress. New solutions are needed for detecting work-related stress so that the situation can be addressed in time.

A Finnish technical research centre is currently developing health and well-being solutions, as part of its new project, based on top expertise in areas such as artificial intelligence and diagnostic tools.

"In the Mad@Work project, we examine methods based on artificial intelligence to detect work stress," noted Johanna Kallio, Senior Scientist and Project Manager at VTT (a Finnish state-owned and controlled non-profit limited liability company, which provides research and innovation services and information).

"For this purpose, we obtain data from motion detectors embedded in the workplace environment and sensors measuring environmental quality, which monitor changes in the employees' movements and working conditions. When the data is modelled using algorithms, anomalous behaviour patterns and employees' state of stress can be identified," she added.

MONITORING WELLBEING AT WORK

"Stress also affects the way we use digital devices, which may be analysed using software installed on the device.



In remote work, the lack of contacts, the continuous succession of remote meetings and poor ergonomics may increase stress.

The state of stress may manifest itself, for example, as an atypical keystroke rhythm or duration of application usage."

The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and VTT is to launch a joint pilot project on monitoring place-independent well-being at work. When well-being data is collected at the individual level, that information security and privacy are maintained. The cybersecurity services company Nixu will ensure that the solutions developed in the project will be safe and that the individuals involved can always manage their own data.

Any work stress detected must also be made visible. VTT is currently developing a next generation organisation barometer, which will provide the means for this. Typically, well-being at work is measured with surveys one to two times a year, but the new barometer would allow it to be monitored continuously.

Based on the information, it will be possible to provide means for supporting the work culture and the

individual coping at work at the right time. The impacts of the measures taken could then also be monitored.

New tools for supporting well-being will be developed with business partners. Hints Performance's contribution to the project will be strong expertise in supporting individual employees and developing business cultures. Helvar, Martela and UniqAir are developing solutions for a comfortable, efficient and healthy indoor environment. Granlund and Haltian Empathic Building, on the other hand, will facilitate overall management of the workplace environment by providing platforms for the integration of different services.

The total budget of the Mad@Work project is €10m, of which €7.3m will be allocated to research and product development carried out in Finland.

The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health is one of the project partners, which also include a consortium in Spain and Portugal, and partners in Korea and Austria.

SAFETY AT WORK IS A 'FUNDAMENTAL' RIGHT, CLAIMS UNION

On 28 April – International Workers' Memorial Day – unions can send a message that “health and safety protection at work must be recognised as a fundamental right for all”, according to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed an occupational health crisis in workplaces worldwide. “So, whether it is Covid or occupational cancers, or workplace injuries and industrial diseases, every worker should have a right to a voice and a right to protection. No-one should have to die to make a living,” the global union announced in a statement.

The ITUC says workers are routinely denied even basic health and safety protections, including consultation with safety reps and safety committees on ‘Covid-safe’ policies and practices, free access to personal protective equipment and protection from victimisation for raising health and safety concerns.

Unions secured agreement at the International Labour Conference in 2019 that occupational health and safety should



be recognised as an International Labour Organisation (ILO) “fundamental right at work” – the universally accepted and binding rights protecting all workers, everywhere. ITUC says the challenge now is to make sure this happens.

BIDEN ORDERS OSHA TO DO MORE TO PROTECT WORKERS FROM COVID

Since taking office as the new US President, one of Joe Biden’s many Executive Orders has directed the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue guidance to employers on how to protect workers from COVID-19.

The Executive Order on Protecting Worker Health and Safety requires OSHA to release guidance to employers on workplace safety during the pandemic and to evaluate whether any emergency temporary standards are

needed. The agency has until 15 March to issue emergency standards, which could include mask-wearing in the workplace.

The order also requires a review of OSHA’s enforcement efforts related to COVID-19 and requires the administration to identify what changes could be made to protect workers, including those within long-term care facilities.

“With OSHA missing in action for all these months, thousands of lives

have been lost,” according to David Michaels, the former head of OSHA under President Obama.

“President Biden is telling OSHA, to consider whether to issue a standard, which OSHA has to do legally. And there’s no doubt they will move forward and issue a standard which will have clear requirements for employers to protect workers.”

Biden also has told the agency to ramp up enforcement and to use its resources to help the hardest-hit communities and workers who are most at risk, Michaels said.

The biggest difference, he added, is that employers likely now will risk facing large monetary fines for not complying with the OSHA standard, compared with “a minor slap on the wrist” they would have faced under the previous administration.

Since Federal OSHA laws can only go so far, the President also has asked Congress to pass legislation strengthening and expanding OSHA’s authority.

Biden issued a separate Executive Order to set up a pandemic testing board that will work to co-ordinate federal testing efforts. The board will look at any issues such as major testing shortages and how to boost testing for at-risk settings such as factories or long-term care facilities.



US President Joe Biden signs an executive order as Vice President Kamala Harris looks on

US SAFETY COUNCIL CONGRESS & EXPO GOES VIRTUAL IN MARCH



To register for the NSC Safety Congress & Expo visit www.congress.nsc.org

The opening session of this year's National Safety Council (NSC) Safety Congress & Expo in the US, which takes place online on 1-5 March, will discuss the ongoing effects of COVID-19 on the workplace.

The virtual event will feature 11 Professional Development Seminars on 1-2 March, with the Expo Floor opening on 3 March.

Lorraine M. Martin, CEO and NSC President, and John Howard, Director of the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOSH), will start the event with the opening session on the impact of COVID-19 on the workplace, followed by the subsequent Executive Forum on leading trends in environmental, health and safety.

Corrie Pitzer, CEO of SAFEmap International, will present the keynote address – 'The Final Frontier: Zero Fatalities' – on 4 March, followed by Ricky Rollins, who will give the motivational address, wrapping up the keynote presentations.

Attendees will have 38 Technical Sessions to choose from, and an opportunity to visit the New Product Showcase. They may also visit the virtual Expo Floor as a 'safety voyager'.

WHO PUTS PRESSURE ON 'ADEQUATE STAFFING' IN NURSING HOMES

New guidance from the World Health Organisation (WHO) echoes calls from UNI Global Union (formerly Union Network International) for sufficient staffing in nursing homes, saying it is 'critical' to ensuring infection control and quality care during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the January 2021 interim paper, WHO recommends that long-term care facilities should "ensure adequate staffing levels and staff organisation, appropriate working hours and protection of health workers from occupational risks".

It adds that protective measures for workers should include sick pay and vaccination against Covid-19. The use of temporary workers, which WHO says "is associated with increased risk of infection," should be limited as much as possible. UNI says this mirrors its demands for permanent employment contracts in long-term care facilities.

Adrian Durtschi, Head of UNI's sectoral group UNICARE, said: "One of the best ways to implement and monitor WHO guidelines is to give workers a voice. Research shows a direct correlation between unionisation and a reduction in Covid-19 transmission rates and deaths.

"Unionised nursing homes are safer because workers have the ability to bargain collectively for permanent contracts, sick pay and adequate staffing."



UNION FIRMS HAVE LOWER LOST-TIME CLAIM RATES, STUDY CONFIRMS

A new study by the Institute for Work & Health (IWH) has replicated an earlier finding of a “union safety effect” – in which unionised companies have lower lost-time injury rates than non-unionised firms – in Ontario’s industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI) construction sector.

Using workers’ compensation claims data from 2012 to 2018, the study found that unionised ICI construction



companies had a 25-per-cent lower rate of lost-time injuries than non-unionised ones. Sponsored by the Ontario Construction Secretariat (OCS), the study also found a 23-per-cent lower rate of musculoskeletal injuries and a 16-per-cent lower rate of critical or severe injuries in unionised compared to non-unionised counterparts.

These findings are similar to those in the original study, also funded by OCS and published by IWH in 2015. OCS is a joint management-labour not-for-profit organisation, created under the Ontario Labour Relations Act, to represent the interests of the unionized ICI sector.

Results were shared in a recent IWH Speaker Series webinar presented by IWH Scientist Dr Lynda Robson, who co-led the study with IWH Senior Scientist and President Dr Cam Mustard. A full report on the findings is also available on the IWH website www.iwh.on.ca.

“This study was not designed to examine reasons for the observed union safety effect and, therefore, cannot be definitive about those reasons. However, the results are consistent with the focus of many unions on controlling occupational health and safety (OHS) risks at worksites,” noted Dr Robson.

“Unions’ actions include putting OHS in collective agreements, delivering worker training, sharing OHS information, and participating in joint health and safety and worker trades committees. It may also be that the presence of a union empowers workers to report unsafe conditions and refuse unsafe work,” she added.

COVID’S WORK DEATHS GOING UNREPORTED BY US FIRMS

Workplace safety regulators in the US have taken a lenient stance toward employers during the pandemic, giving them broad discretion to decide internally whether to report worker deaths according to a news report.

As a result, scores of deaths were not reported to occupational safety officials from the earliest days of the pandemic through to late October 2020, a study by Kaiser Health News (KHN) has found.

KHN examined more than 240 deaths of healthcare workers profiled for the ‘Lost on the Frontline’ project and found that employers failed to report more than one-third of them to a state or federal workplace safety regulators, many based on internal decisions that the deaths were not work-related – conclusions that were not independently reviewed.

Work safety advocates say Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigations into staff deaths can help officials pinpoint problems before they endanger other employees as well as patients or residents. Through to 5 November 2020, federal OSHA offices issued 63 citations to facilities for failing to report a death.

However, many deaths receive little or no scrutiny from work safety authorities. In California, public health officials have documented about 200 healthcare worker deaths, yet the state’s OSHA office received only 75 fatality reports at healthcare facilities up to 26 October 2020.

“It is so disrespectful of the agencies and the employers to shunt these cases aside and not do everything possible to investigate the exposures,” said Peg Seminario, a retired union

health and safety director who co-authored a study on OSHA oversight with scholars from Harvard’s TH Chan School of Public Health.

Former head of OSHA David Michaels warned the reporting rules were “absurd”, and added that OSHA was more concerned with “hiding employee infections and shielding employers from their obligation to protect workers than protecting workers from infection”.



David Michael, former head of OSHA, described the reporting rules as “absurd”.



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