

UNISON City of Edinburgh Branch Health and Safety Plan 2010

Recruitment

Currently according to the records available to me we have 35 Safety Reps in the Branch. It's very hard to identify how many of these reps are active due to the fact that we don't have an effective communication structure. It appears that some of these reps are working effectively but in isolation however others may no longer be Safety Reps or may not be active. Either way 35 is insufficient to properly carry out Health and Safety activities in a Branch this size.

UNISON has started a campaign called Safety in Numbers. The aim of the campaign is to recruit more Safety Reps with a view to having one per workplace. I think that this target will be very difficult to achieve in our Branch but we do need to try. The campaign is supposed to feature a website and will run for one year from July 2009. I can't see any evidence that the website is up and running.

In the absence of the website I would want to try to raise the profile of Safety issues through the Stewards Committee network and to try to encourage them to help recruit more Safety Reps in their Departments. We have a number of large workplaces who don't appear to have a Safety Rep in them and this is certainly an area that we need to change.

Internal

At the moment communication amongst Safety Reps is patchy. As noted above it's clear that some of our Safety Reps are working effectively but the successes they are having are not being communicated well within the Safety Rep community so good practices aren't being spread.

For us to work effectively we have to have an improved communication structure. I have booked dates for monthly Safety Rep meetings over the course of the year. At the moment the venue for all of them is the Branch Office but as the meetings become better attended we will probably need larger venues. Meetings will be open to all Safety Reps; if there is an issue that requires a vote to be taken it can be voted on by committee members only. At the moment the actual membership of the Branch Health and Safety sub committee isn't clear but for 2010 I would want to see each Steward's Committee appointing 2 members so that we will have a proper structure to work within.

Below Branch level we will also need to be organised at Divisional level. Health and Safety should have a structure that replicates the structure within the Branch so we need to have better communications between Safety Reps within each Division. This does not necessarily have to mean that all Divisions need to have a monthly Health and Safety reps meeting, but that shouldn't be ruled out where that approach would be the best option within a Division.

I would also hope to use the Branch website more effectively to make up to date Health and Safety information to members.

Safety reps have also advised that they find workplace meetings are useful to spread information about how safety concerns have been tackled in other workplaces with similar safety issues.

External

In the main there are two working relationships that we need to build externally to the Branch. The first is with the other unions representing staff in our workplaces. If we are going to negotiate effectively on Safety issues it's important that we have a united front when dealing with management. I've tried to make contact with GMB and Unite and will try to ensure that we liaise on Safety issues where appropriate to put pressure on management to make workplaces safer. The second relationship is with management and is covered below under Consultation.

Training

The appropriate training for workplace Safety Reps is the first two stages of the TUC approved training (Health and Safety Stage 1 & Next Steps for Safety Reps). Each course lasts ten days and usually runs every term at Stevenson College. It's important that all Safety Reps undertake the training. Any Safety Reps who are active but haven't completed the training need to arrange to do so. Paid time off forms part of our industrial relations agreement with management and I will take up any issues where staff are unreasonably refused time. It is recommended that Reps should leave one year between stages 1 and 2 but this is not mandatory and there will be occasions where Reps will be able to complete them in less time. Where Safety Reps have a more strategic role the appropriate training is the Stage 3 TUC Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety). The section on Consultation goes into more detail on what the role involves but it would be desirable for the Branch to have Safety Reps in each Division who have undertaken this training.

Consultation

In March 2009 the Council signed off the new Health and Safety Policy which was agreed by the Unions. This committed it to setting up an overarching Council joint safety committee and to setting up committees within each Division. These committees are not yet functioning. The first Services for Communities meeting will take place in January 2010. I have advised the Council that I want the first full Council one to take place before the end of March 2010 which is a year since the publishing of the policy so shouldn't be an unrealistic target.

These Council and Divisional meetings should take place quarterly and represent a big challenge for the Branch. We will need to assemble a team to attend each committee. Some of our Safety Reps are already experienced at

consultation from other roles Trade Union roles but others aren't and will only gain the experience required by attending the meetings. By the end of this year I would hope that each committee will have met at least 2 or 3 times and we will be gaining experience in them. To help our Safety Reps I am trying to pursue agreement on a standard constitution and agenda for these committees. Health and safety is an area where we have a great deal of legislative power should we choose to exercise it and by standardising the format of meetings we can ensure that they are run in accordance with H&S law.

The committee structure is only part of the work we need to do as Safety Reps. We also need to ensure that risk assessments are being properly carried out and adequately reviewed, accident reporting and corrective action is taking place and that any other actions management should be taking to make workplaces safer are being done. Getting the committee structure up and running makes it easier to scrutinise what management are doing and easier to hold them to account.

Over the year health and safety work will become harder as more changes come in the way we work. Management intend to increase home working which will require careful risk assessment and monitoring, increased casualisation of the workforce usually means a decrease in training and a lower awareness of safety controls among workers and the risk of work being outsourced to private contractors makes consultation harder as it moves work out of the Council's framework as well as introducing the risks that always arise when companies try to make a profit out of providing a public service and cut corners.

Dave McConnell
Branch Health and Safety Officer
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