



Office of Hon Ruth Dyson

Minister of Labour

Minister for ACC

Minister for Senior Citizens

Minister for Disability Issues

Associate Minister for Social Development and Employment (Child, Youth & Family Services)

MP for Banks Peninsula

07/69564

Mr Paul Jarvie
OHSIG Chairperson
c/- Private Bag 92066
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07 SEP 2007

Dear Mr Jarvie

Thank you for your letter of 3 August 2007, providing recommendations from the Occupational Health and Safety Industry Group (OHSIG) for reducing the burden of harm in New Zealand workplaces.

Firstly I would like to congratulate the members of OHSIG on their initiative in establishing this forum to work collectively on workplace health and safety. I am pleased to see OHSIG's active support for the Workplace Health and Safety Strategy.

Many of the ideas suggested by OHSIG for reducing the burden of harm are topical, and this is highlighted by their inclusion in the Workplace Health and Safety Strategy. I would like to bring to your attention the range of agency initiatives underway that aim to address many of these areas, in particular professional development and lifelong learning, the provision of information, codes, guidelines and standards, performance indicators, and high risk industry performance.

Several of OHSIG's recommendations relate to continuous professional development for the occupational health and safety industry, Department of Labour inspectors and Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) injury prevention consultants, and developing a register identifying specialists. This Government acknowledges the importance of professional bodies and the role they have to play. Strengthening the competency of occupational safety and health practitioners through development programmes is a stated objective of the Strategy within the Industry Leadership outcome area.

The Government's Quality Regulation Review also identified this topic as an area for attention. I understand that members of OHSIG participated in the Review project looking at the interface between the Health and Safety in Employment (HSE) Act 1992, the Injury Prevention, Rehabilitation and Compensation (IPRC) Act 2001, and the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) Act 1996. Many stakeholders generously provided their views to help identify practical improvements to the way these Acts are implemented.

One of the longer term solutions identified by the Interface Project is helping to improve the standard of service and accountability of health and safety professionals. I strongly encourage OHSIG members to read the summary report and take the opportunity to provide feedback on the issues and solutions proposed. The report is available from the Department of Labour website: <http://dol.govt.nz/consultation/interface-project/index.asp>.

I support the concept of lifelong learning in health and safety, from schooling to professional development. I am excited about the Passport to Safety initiative, a web-based, self-paced health and safety learning programme for young people. Introduced by the Safe Communities Foundation New Zealand, and supported by the Department of Labour and ACC, the Passport to Safety initiative is being piloted for delivery in schools around the country.

I understand that the Department already actively encourages its staff, including inspectors, to acquire qualifications relevant to their current and future work, and provides study assistance in the form of study leave and financial assistance.

Further OHSIG recommendations relate to Codes of Practice and Guidelines, Workplace Exposure Standards, ACC audit tools, and information for small businesses. The Interface Project also identified initiatives for improvements in many of these areas.

I understand that initiatives already underway include an on-line hazard self assessment tool for small business, and a review of auditing methods used for ACC's Partnership Programme. Again, I would encourage you to read the Interface Project report and take the opportunity to provide feedback. I am also advised that the Department of Labour is currently looking at how to update the present Workplace Exposure Standards for New Zealand. This project forms part of the Strategy's Airborne Substances programme and will start in the 2007/08 financial year.

OHSIG also recommends a move towards positive performance indicators. I note that promoting positive safety cultures is a key ingredient of the Strategy. I understand that the Department of Labour is investigating the links between positive safety cultures and health and safety and productivity outcomes, including indicators. An encouraging finding from research already completed by the Department is that New Zealand businesses can better understand the links between health and safety initiatives and productivity by measuring what matters through positive performance indicators. I understand that this research will be published by October 2007.

Demonstrating performance in high risk sectors is a further OHSIG recommendation. High risk industries are a national priority area under the Strategy. The Department and ACC are developing a risk landscape based on a wide range of data, including the NOHSAC report, to better assess high risk industries and to inform the best range of interventions to manage risk in these areas.

Regarding OHSIG's recommendations on funding for research and development, two research funding partnerships for occupational safety and health research are already in place with the Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC). They are the Occupational Health Partnership between the Department of Labour and the HRC, and the Joint Research Portfolio funded by ACC, the HRC and the Department. Requests for tender are published on the Health Research Council website to ensure contestability.

Undertaking research into occupational health in New Zealand was a Strategy priority this year, with requests for tender for the following research projects:

- occupational asthma
- occupational dermatitis
- workplace stress and bullying
- workplace exposure to carcinogens.

Projects under the Joint Research Portfolio include health and safety interventions in agriculture, and improving the control and management of noise in workplaces.

In relation to OHSIG's recommendation for resources for the Department of Labour, the Government has recently made more resources available – approximately \$28.4 million over the next four years. This funding will, amongst other initiatives, increase the Department's ability to attend workplace information visits, perform workplace assessments, and undertake intensive investigations and prosecutions. The extra funding will also allow for more proactive support for businesses through standard-setting, and specialist support in high hazard and occupational disease areas.

Finally, some of the OHSIG recommendations relate to specific Regulations and New Zealand Standards. It is best to discuss these technical details directly with the Department. I note that you have forwarded a copy of your letter to Andrew Annakin at the Department of Labour. The Department has indicated that it would welcome discussing these concerns with you and I encourage you to contact them directly.

Yours sincerely



Hon Ruth Dyson
Minister of Labour