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NOISE-INDUCED HEARING LOSS "The Silent Pandemic"

ABSTRACT

THIS presentation raises the increasing concerns being expressed about an old and familiar topic, i.e., noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL). In spite of many efforts by past Government and non-Government agencies as well as others, current compensation costs of over \$NZ50 million annually continue to rise rapidly. While this financial figure is significant, there are substantial avoidable personal effects on the individuals concerned.

ACC is embarking on an intensive programme of intervention over the next 5-10 years to seek synergy with industries and others to reduce the future burden of this disease on the community.

THIS presentation will describe the current national situation, surveys of SMEs (Small to Medium Sized Enterprises) with regard to NIHL, the comprehensive research programme underway and the planned intervention programme to reduce the burden from NIHL to New Zealand industry in the future.

Overview

NIHL has been around for centuries. Even as far back as 29-79AD noise was an issue as it was subsequently in the middle ages and the Victorian times. Later it was regarded as the "unavoidable consequence of work". Today, and for some decades, it has been regarded internationally as a disease which is almost completely avoidable with current knowledge. In spite of this, the disease continues to present challenges in terms of intervention and claims to ACC continue to rise.

There have been many efforts by numerous organisations both Government and others over many decades in the past that have focussed on raising awareness of NIHL as a serious issue requiring intervention. In spite of a great deal of effort including the publication of Codes of Practice, guidelines and many other documents, the ACC claims are continuing to rise daily. Current compensation costs, largely paid for by industry, exceed \$50m p.a. and are rapidly rising. Both the current level and the size of the increases are worrying.

Surveys among the SMEs (Small to Medium Sized Enterprises) among different industry sectors in New Zealand has shown that there is a low level of awareness about NIHL, that the seriousness is not appreciated and that where there is awareness, no further action is

BELIEVED TO BE NECESSARY BECAUSE OF ACTION TAKEN IS SUFFICIENT (e.g., DONNING OF EAR-MUFFS WHEN USING LOUD MACHINERY).

NIXL IS ALSO A MAJOR ISSUE FOR INDUSTRY AND IT HAS BEEN SHOWN TO SERIOUSLY AFFECT PRODUCTIVITY IN INDUSTRY AS WELL AS THE SERIOUS AND DEBILITATING EFFECT SUCH AS DEPRESSION AMONG THE ELDERLY. EVEN AMONG THE YOUNGER GENERATION TODAY, THERE IS LITTLE INTEREST OR AWARENESS OF NIXL AS A SERIOUS ISSUE, IN SPITE OF SOME EVIDENCE THAT INCREASING NUMBERS AND YOUNGER AGE GROUPS ARE INCREASINGLY AFFECTED.

The presentation

THE PRESENTATION WILL DESCRIBE THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE CURRENT NIXL ISSUE TO NEW ZEALAND INDUSTRY AND HIGHLIGHT THE INTERVENTIONS THAT ARE CURRENTLY BEING PLANNED AND WHICH WILL BE INTRODUCED OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS. THIS INCLUDES CURRENT RESEARCH PROGRAMMES BY TEAMS OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESEARCHERS AT AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY AND MASSEY UNIVERSITY, THE LIMITATIONS OF HEARING CONSERVATION INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES INSTEAD OF NOISE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES, JOINT WORK PLANNED WITH INDUSTRY, POTENTIAL TRAINING OF ACC APPROVED NIXL CONSULTANTS AND JOINT SYNERGY WORK WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS.

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