



National Irish Safety Organisation

UPDATE!

SPRING
'08



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President George Brett

The National Irish Safety Organisation's National Executive has ratified a new three-year business plan to take the organisation towards 2011.

Like every not-for-profit membership organisation, NISO must continually take a critical look at the services and value it provides to its members and stakeholders. The new business plan builds on the ambitious strategy developed for NISO by Price Waterhouse Coopers in 2005.

The change process accompanying the implementation of the original PWC-based strategy has not always been easy. The significant successes achieved are due in no small measure to the combined efforts and commitment of central office staff, led by CEO Pierce Martin, the National Executive and the Regional Committees. I would also like to acknowledge the support received from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Irish Insurance Federation.

The new plan is underpinned by a significant investment in new web-based technology and telecommunications, which will integrate NISO's back office support systems, financial systems, and training, marketing and membership activities.

As part of the new business plan the National Executive approved in principle the relocation of our offices at Calmount. These developments will position the organisation better to serve not only larger organisations, but also the important SME sector, in meeting the many challenges brought on by the enactment of new health and safety legislation. They will also ensure our continued success and growth as a national organisation.

NISO strategy: fostering the health debate

The new NISO strategy, which will emphasise the importance of health at work, links into the new EU five-year strategy, which has set the ambitious target of cutting occupational accidents, ill-health and diseases by 25% across EU workplaces over the period 2007 – 2010. The EU strategy sees this being achieved through each member state defining and implementing national strategies targeting sectors and companies most affected, and setting in turn national targets. What is far-reaching in the new EU strategy is its inclusion of occupational ill-health and diseases in the ambitious targets set.

The challenge here is evident from recently released figures, from a study for the International Labour Organisation which is due to be published shortly, which highlighted that occupational-related deaths could be at a rate ten times higher than those presently attributable to workplace accidents, when account is taken of workplace-related terminable illnesses and diseases.

These figures from the study, which are likely to give rise to debate, are disturbing when read in conjunction with recent research released by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, which has produced compelling evidence of strong links to work-related cancers for a range of work activities.

Against this background, the need to have a national occupational health strategy in place becomes all the more pressing and urgent. The priority being given to this task by the Board of the Health & Safety Authority in its 2008 Work Programme is, I believe, critical.

Discussion and debate is already taking place within NISO on the contribution we can make

towards raising occupational health as a priority focus in workplaces throughout Ireland. Throughout the year, we will be running a series of talks and debates on the subject with our wider membership and the business community.

The theme of this year's NISO conference in Trim, County Meath, on October 16-17, will focus on occupational health and illness, with an emphasis on identifying early and effective preventative and corrective actions. I encourage all our members to actively participate and engage in the development of this important national strategy.

I would also like to update you on progress in other events. Over 200 companies attended a series of all-island briefing workshops on the NISO Gold Standard and on this year's Occupational Safety Awards held in February and March (*see article pg9*).

Local safety quizzes are underway in our eight Regions, from which contestants will go forward into the National Safety Quiz to be held in Limerick on April 12, 2008. Our National AGM is scheduled for Buswell's Hotel, Dublin, on April 23, 2008, at which NISO's new three-year plan will be launched. We are also running for the third year the National First Aid Championships in Dublin on May 24, 2008 in partnership with the Civil Defence and the Order of Malta.

We have a full and busy year of activities ahead. We want to build a strong and vibrant health and safety community with your involvement. Enjoy this Update and share your views and ideas with us. And keep in touch with our new web developments by visiting www.niso.ie. We welcome your feedback and suggestions.



NISO UPDATE! is issued by the National Irish Safety Organisation (NISO).

Material printed in **NISO UPDATE!** is not necessarily endorsed by the National Irish Safety Organisation.

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Printing: Orchard Print Ltd. Rathfarnham, Dublin 16. Tel: 493 6336

Construction Safety Code published

The Construction Safety Code of Practice, which has just been published, aims to make it easier for construction contractors employing three or fewer workers to comply with health and safety legislation.

The *Construction Safety Code of Practice for Contractors with Three or Less Employees* is based on the HSA's awarding Safe System of Work Plan.

Speaking at the launch of the Code, the Minister for Labour Affairs, Billy Kelleher, T.D., having welcomed the fact that the Code was developed by workers and employers representatives getting together, said the purpose of the Code is to ensure people are aware of their obligations.

Speaking for the Authority, HSA chief executive Martin O'Halloran said the Code is there to assist industry.

Contractors who employ three or fewer workers and who use the Code will not

have to draw up a safety statement. The Code is based around the SSWPs for house building, ground works, civil engineering, commercial buildings and demolition. As further SSWPs are developed they will be incorporated into the Code. A DVD, which is presented by the well architect Duncan Stewart, has been produced to accompany the Code.

The Code can be purchased from the Authority (cost €50). Speaking at the launch, NISO chief executive Pierce Martin described the Code as "a fabulous resource".

HSA guidance documents on General Application Regulations

The HSA has published two guidance documents on the General Application Regulations 2007: one a comprehensive detailed 15-part document and the other a short guide for SMEs.

The *Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007* builds on the old guide to the 1993 General

Application Regulations, with many of the useful guidance notes from that document republished in updated form: for example the contents of first aid boxes. Additionally, the Guide is replete with references to standards and further guidance material.

Safety Toolkit and Short Guide to the General Application Regulations 2007 has been written in a checklist format, with a short introduction to each of the 15 discrete sets of regulations in the General Application Regulations. The toolkit poses questions for the employer: this is

what I should be doing, it asks me have I done it and it requires me to specify an action date to put in place a control strategy.

Aimed particularly at small and medium-sized businesses, the toolkit was launched at meeting attended by representatives from the SFA, ISME, the CIF and others organisations, representing both employers and employees in small businesses. Expressing the view that the guidance documents will be of great use to business, NISO chief executive Pierce Martin welcomed their publication.

Health issues coming to the fore

Health issues are likely to come to the fore over the coming years, with the HSA likely to publish its occupational health strategy in late spring and suggestions that as many as 1,400 people were killed by work-related diseases and accidents in 2003.

In a presentation to the board of the European Agency, Dr Jukka Takala, the director of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, said that 167,000 fatalities in the European Union could be attributed to work-related accidents and diseases. Looking at the figures for Ireland in 2003,

using a statistical method known as the attributable fraction, he estimated that 1,413 people died as a result of work-related accidents and diseases in Ireland that year. While HSA figures record that 65 people died in workplace accidents, Dr Takala puts the figure at 80.

The HSA's strategy document, *Workplace Health and Well-Being Strategy*, will be a wide-ranging document, dealing with prevention (which is within the Authority's remit), promotion and rehabilitation. NISO is looking forward to the publication of the HSA's occupational health strategy, which will, NISO chief executive Pierce Martin says be "an important development".

In recent months the HSA has published a number of documents on work-related health issues. Late last year, the Dockrell, Johnson and Ganly report on the cost of manual handling injuries in the healthcare sector was published and more recently, new hearing check guidelines were issued. Both these documents are available on the HSA's website, www.hsa.ie.

Meanwhile, occupational health issues have been attracting national media attention. There have been reports of alleged bullying of staff in schools. An action by teachers in a Dublin school was reported as settled, just before a High Court hearing. A study by the HSE has found that most eye injuries are sustained in the workplace and that non-English speaking workers were more likely to suffer eye injuries.

Roadworks get a Safe System of Work Plan

A new Safe System of Work Plan for working on roads, which has been developed by the HSA in co-operation with the Local Government Management Services Board, has been published.

Speaking at the launch of the Safe System of Work Plan (SSWP) the Minister for Labour Affairs, Billy Kelleher, T.D., said the plan is tailor-made to ensure safer workplaces.

Welcoming the SSWP, the Minister said it is very encouraging to see the HSA, local authorities and the Local Authority Safety Advisors Group working in partnership to develop the plan.

The SSWP for Working on Roads follows the scheme of the earlier award-winning SSWP. Designed to be filled in on-site, the SSWP allows workers and their supervisors to set out details of the job being done and to identify the hazards and specify the control measures put in place. Then on completion of the SSWP form, which is a two-sided A4

pictogram document, it is signed off by members of the team working on the specific job.

The plan can be purchased from the HSA: go to www.hsa.ie, click on 'publications' and follow the links.



Quarries Regulations: law from May 1st

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Quarries) Regulations 2008, which were signed into law recently by the Minister for Labour Affairs, Billy Kelleher, T.D., will come into force on May 1st.

The regulations will bring the rules governing health and safety in the quarry industry under the framework of the SHWW Act 2005. The new regulations modernise the rules governing health and safety in quarries,

by placing the emphasis on management structures, competence and skills training.

Under the new regulations a number of important definitions are changed and operators are required to put in place a management structure to manage safety in quarries. A new Quarries Skills Certification scheme, akin to the CSCS, will come into force on November 1, 2009.

The provisions of the Mines and Quarries Act 1965 and regulations made under that Act, in so far as they relate to quarries, are repealed by a separate statutory instrument,

the *Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 (Quarries) (Repeals and Revocations) (Commencement) Order 2005*.

Given the imminence of the new Regulations, a course starting in Athlone Institute of Technology, Managing Safety in Quarries, should prove popular with those working in the industry - as should the DVD which the HSA, in association with Roadstone Dublin, has produced. The DVD can be downloaded from the Authority's website, www.hsa.ie, as can a toolbox talk for quarry operators.

NISO chief executive Pierce Martin says NISO is working with the Northern Ireland Safety Group on a quarry safety initiative.

The role of the HSA inspector

The HSA inspector's job is to prevent accidents or harm to workers, by assessing health and safety management systems, detecting contraventions of the law, offering information and advice and where necessary, taking appropriate enforcement action.

That, in the words of HSA inspector Kay Baxter, is "the way we see ourselves". Baxter, who was speaking at a seminar organised by the NISO East Region, told delegates that the "key legislative items on the inspector's checklist are the duties of directors and managers, risk assessments, safety statements and the principles of prevention".

When inspectors visit workplaces, Baxter said they will, be looking for evidence of health and safety management. Saying that directors and managers are a key part of management systems, Baxter added that "workers need to see commitment from the bosses".

Nor, she warned, will inspectors accept "generic safety statements". Safety statements must be specific to the workplace and risk assessment in large workplaces should be specific to areas in the workplace.

Dealing with two controversial issues - emergency exit doors and lifting persons in machines not designed for the purpose - Baxter set out clearly the HSA's position. Emergency exit doors should open outwards and the only time persons can be lifted in machines not designed for the purpose is in exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances means 'exceptional' and not something that could be foreseen or work that could be planned.



Fall arrest system safety warning

The HSA has published a warning about concerns with fall arrest systems.

0529.7102 which can be seen at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/falls/fixedrail011007.htm>. Those interested in this story may also want to look at the response from the manufacturer which is on their website www.haca.com. Following the HSE warning, the company has developed a new runner, model number 0529.7103 which will be available from 15th February. Users of this system are advised to review their arrangements in the light of the concerns raised".

Picking up on a warning from the HSE in Britain, the Authority has published the following warning on its website, www.hsa.ie: "The UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) issued a warning last November in regard to HACA fixed rail vertical fall arrest system type

HSA workplace transport campaign

Later this year the HSA will be launching a workplace vehicle transport safety campaign, which will see 500 targeted inspections, focussing on workplace vehicle safety management practices.

This will involve examination of safety management systems in relation to work-related vehicles. As part of the campaign, the

Authority will be holding a series of regional seminars. The focus will be on safety management practices, management of pedestrian safety, fleet maintenance, falls from vehicles, management of loading and unloading operations.

HSA inspector Deirdre Sinnott says: "Practically all places of work are subject to the hazards of moving vehicles in one form or another, ranging from heavy duty mobile plant, HGVs, Vans, Cars, specialist equipment through to warehouse forklift trucks".

Sinnott says recent research has demonstrated that the most common causation factors in workplace vehicle accidents involve: people being hit by vehicles; people falling from vehicles; objects falling from vehicles; and vehicles toppling over. "These factors can be addressed by appropriate work-related vehicle safety management systems being deployed for each differing work environment", she says.

As part of the buildup to the campaign, the Authority plans to carry out a survey to examine the practices and attitudes of employers relating to work-related vehicle safety and in October the Authority will hold seminars in Cork, Dublin and Galway.

NISO AGM to debate strategy

NISO members will have an opportunity to debate the NISO business plan and strategy 2008-2011 at the Organisation's forthcoming AGM.

At the AGM, which will be held in Buswell's Hotel, Dublin, on April 23, members will hear

about how the investment in the NISO website is central to the Organisation's plans for the future. Members will also hear about how NISO plans to promote the occupational health agenda.

Another topic on the agenda will be plans to move from the present central office location at Calmount Park, in the heart of southwest Dublin's industrial and office park belt.



QUIZ SEASON HAS ARRIVED

The 2008 Health and Safety Quiz, organised by NISO and the NISG is well underway. Many regions have reported record entries for the Quiz and a number of teams, who have won regional quizzes – including Helsinn Birex who won the NISO East Region Quiz and ESB Turlough Hill who won the region's novices quiz – are looking forward to the National Final in Limerick on April 12th. The runners up in the East Region Quiz were Dublin Bus, with SR Technics taking the runners up place in the novices quiz. Download the Brochure and Application Form <http://www.niso.ie/Portals/0/PublicDocuments/QuizBroRed.pdf>

So if construction activity is down – what’s happening to health and safety?

We are all aware of the downturn in construction activity, particularly domestic house building, but Mary Darlington asks what impact, if any, is it having on health and safety within construction companies?

We know from HSA statistics that construction is one of the worst sectors for fatalities and serious injuries, next only to farming and fishing. The following table shows the level of fatalities within construction since 2002:

| Construction fatalities, 2002-2007 | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| 2002 | 21 |
| 2003 | 20 |
| 2004 | 16 |
| 2005 | 23 |
| 2006 | 13 |
| 2007 | 18 |

(Source HSA website – <http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Statistics/>)

With regard to the level of activity within the sector, we know from published statistics that in 2005, the value of output in the construction industry was almost €32 billion - i.e. 80% higher than the output figure of €17.6 billion in 2000. We also had the highest construction output per capita in Europe, at approximately €7,600 in 2005. This is more than double the corresponding figure for the United Kingdom.

CSO statistics tell us that house completions in 1992 were 22,000 and reached a peak of over 93,000 in 2006. In the second quarter of 2005, there were 242,000 people employed in the construction industry - approximately one in eight people (12.6%) employed in Ireland. This compares with an EU average of less than 8%.

It is estimated that there were over 25,000 non-Irish nationals working in the construction sector in the fourth quarter of 2005. They represented about 10% of the total number employed in construction. About 15,000 construction workers are from the former accession states.

During 2006, and particularly in the latter half of 2007, the construction slowdown began and Irish construction employment fell 5.4% in year to November 2007 - actual job losses were about 15,000 (Source Finfacts Ireland – reports July 2006 and January 2008).

Where have these workers gone? Well there are several possible answers: some have gone back to their original jobs in farming or have found other local work; some are claiming unemployment benefit; some foreign workers have either gone home to their own countries or gone to where the construction work is, in such countries as the UK (because of the Olympic building programme), to Germany and to Poland, whose economies have picked up.

In order to get a feel for what is happening with regard to health and safety within the sector, I set about doing a small, non-scientific survey of two key groups: (a) health and safety professionals working in the industry itself and; (b) health and safety consultants providing services to the construction sector. In total I received seven replies.

Within (a) I surveyed professionals within two large civil engineering companies, one large house building company, one major builder and one small family builder. Within (b) I surveyed two senior consultants who engage with both large and small contractors. One of these consultants also runs public courses for the construction sector.



I asked them all the following 5 questions:

Question 1 – Is there a downturn within construction as you see it - and if so, by what percentage?

Question 2 – Is this downturn having any impact, positive or negative, on health and safety within your company or with your clients?

Question 3 – Are health and safety professionals doing more or doing less (are there fewer contracts being managed or are there fewer health and safety professionals stretched across several projects)?

Question 4 – Is the downturn providing opportunities to train construction staff, while things are a little quiet?

Question 5 – With fewer staff stretched across projects, is training possible at all?

Any other comments you wish to add.

This is a summary of their responses:

Question 1 – responses: Yes there is a definite downturn, particularly in residential house building. The percentage decrease varies from 10% to 50%, depending on where they are in the sector. One company reported that they have seen other builders going out of business. However, they all report that construction activity in the other sectors, civil and commercial, are not badly affected. The commercial sector is seen as cautious, but utilities are going ahead.

This is having a number of effects, including the fact that those builders previously involved in house building are now quoting for work in other sectors, so there is less work to go around and pricing is highly competitive. Some very visible effects are (i) the disappearance of the species known as “breakfast roll man” and (ii) the absence of construction traffic on places like the Naas Road in the mornings.

Question 2 – responses: Some said there was no impact, as the commercial sector is moving ahead. One stated that they felt that some employees will fake claims of accidents to get money; alternatively they said that with fewer people at work in the sector, there should be fewer accidents. One consultant reported that their services are not as much in demand from their clients as before but that those clients are still as committed to health and safety as before.

The small building company, which has its own in-house OHS expertise, said that it was “business as usual”. One of the other building companies reported that the impact has been positive, because the competition for the remaining contracts is so fierce and because clients are now safety conscious. The senior managers within the building company are now seeing the cost benefits and the overall benefits of health and safety in securing these projects.

Others report business as usual

Question 3 – responses: Some report that health and safety professionals are doing more and are making up for gaps in resources, while others are doing more as legislation becomes more onerous. Others reported that they are aware of some health and safety professionals being laid off by competitors. Some responded that life is normal for their health and safety people.

One builder reported that OHS professionals now have to cover more sites in order to keep costs down, and this has forced line managers to become more pro-active and to rely less on these professionals, as they can't take the full cost of them in their budgets as competition heats up.

Question 4 – responses: All of those surveyed made the point that construction companies have laid many employees off and therefore there are fewer employees left to train. One respondent used the expression “slashing and burning” to explain the level of layoffs. One large company has stated that they are availing of the “quiet time” to provide more training; others report that their training programmes continue as normal. One OHS professional in the large

building company stated that with fewer direct employees, it has been easier to update training simply because of reduced numbers.

The small builder stated that they will not be engaging in any further training until the market picks up again. One consultant reported that more people are attending their public courses, as some are out of work, and they have been promised work if they get trained but are having to fund that training themselves.

Question 5 – responses: Some reported that attendances at training were down, others said that they were making good use of the training, as time now allows them to do it. One large civil engineering company stated that their trainer is stretched to the limit, as there is a great demand for him.

One consultant reported that there has been a new air of confidence in the last few weeks, with machinery operators and contractors getting busier. They further report that architects are being asked to commence more work since the start of February and that the “prophets of doom” used December and January construction figures, which were low, as ammunition to write about construction as being in a very bad way. This respondent felt it is not as bad as is being reported right now.

Others reported that all is normal.

So overall it is a mixed bag, yet health and safety is generally being supported and sustained. As 2008 goes on, we will see the outputs of the “new era in construction”, in both construction output and injuries and fatalities.

This time next year, when we have the Health and Safety Authority figures, we will be able to critically examine if health and safety was “sacrificed” in this changed environment.



(Mary Darlington, B.ScOccS&H, CFIOSH, FCIPD, is a NISO associate, providing health and safety advice to NISO members. Mary can be

contacted by email at info@darlington.ie)

The proposed Scaffolding Code of Practice

Delegates to a seminar organised by the NISO East Region were presented with an illuminating insight to the HSA's proposed new Code of Practice for Access and Working Scaffolding.

The proposed draft Code of Practice, which is expected to come into force later this year, will replace the current Code, which was published in 1989. The draft Code deals mainly with the system scaffolds that are most commonly in use and is in line with the standard IS EN 12811 Part 1:2004.

The main changes brought about by IS EN 128811 are:

- the definition of six service load classes, some with partial load areas
- the definition of seven width classes, whose minima range from 0.6m to 2.4m, with the range of each class being typically 0.3m
- the definition of two headroom classes, where the distinction between platforms is a minimum of 1.9m
- the requirement that the gaps between platform units do not exceed 25mm
- the requirement to have an unimpeded area along the full length of the working area
- a reduction in the number of working platforms in use for light duty
- the definition of an in-service and out-of-service condition for boarded-out platforms
- in the absence of wind, a scaffold shall have an applied working area, on every bay and a notional horizontal load applied separately parallel and perpendicular at bay
- wind loads on scaffolds can be calculated in accordance with BS 6399-2
- tie patterns and their design are not included.

NOT A 'DESIGN MANUAL'

Delving into the intricacies of the draft Code, scaffolding expert Richard O'Mahoney told

delegates that he expected "it will be a little while yet before the Code comes into force". Reflecting the words of the draft Code, that it is not a "design manual", O'Mahoney advised his audience that neither is it "a workshop manual".

What there is, he said, is "a lot more information in the new Code". The proposed new Code includes a lot more drawings and a lot of checklists. Also, sketches will be updated. There is, he added, a lot of information on drilled anchors.

Scaffolding Management



FIVE-STEP MANAGEMENT CHAIN

Turning to the management provisions in the draft Code, O'Mahoney advocated that "the person who manages scaffolds should be the person who is putting people on scaffolds".

The draft Code sets out a five-step management chain:

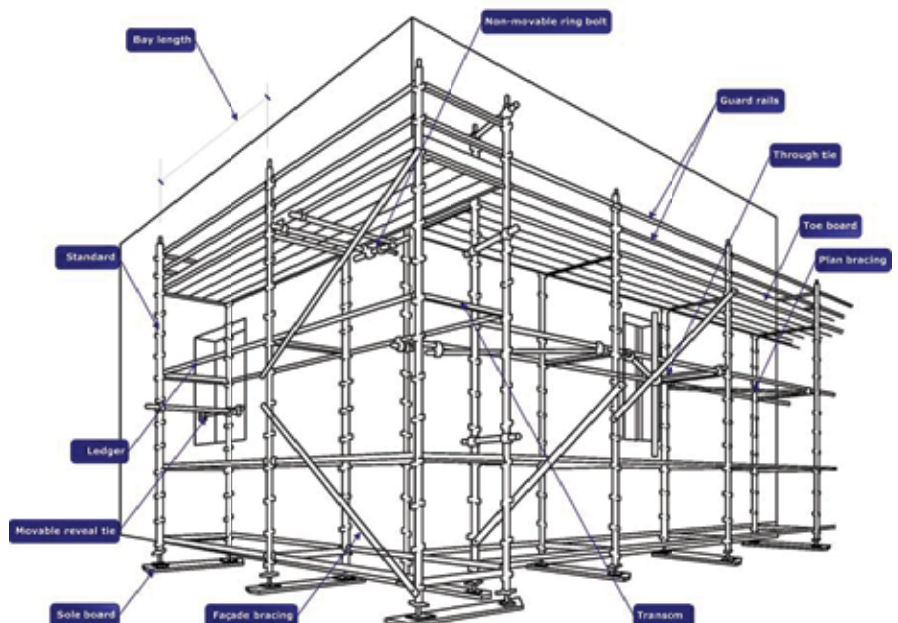
- 1) the contractor defines scaffolding policy
- 2) the erection, use and dismantling of scaffolding stages should be planned, so as to minimise the risks involved
- 3) at the implementation stage, responsibilities should be defined, instruction and training given by competent persons, information communicated and documentation maintained
- 4) periodic checking should be undertaken to determine if standards are being met and to ensure corrective action is undertaken, if it is necessary
- 5) the work should be reviewed.

Dealing with some of the practical issues of managing the implementation of the proposed Code, he said that things often go wrong "when the facades are just about complete". Another issue concerning O'Mahoney is a "lack of bracing".

At a more general level, he expressed concern that "legislation is not finding its way down to where it matters, the workplace".

And, he warned his listeners, "A lot of systems scaffolds need tender, loving care".

Example of an independent tied system scaffold





NISO Gold standard is highly valued by insurers

The new NISO Gold Standard provides a level of quality assurance that is highly valued by the insurance industry, says the National Irish Safety Organisation's chief executive Pierce Martin, who is spearheading NISO's campaign to encourage companies to seek the standard.

Martin's message is backed up by Irish Insurance Federation corporate affairs manager Niall Doyle, who describes the Gold Standard as "useful tool". Explaining how the standard is marked and how each year companies will be able to improve their rating within the standard, he says, it will enable companies to demonstrate that their safety performance is improving.

This in turn will help companies to control insurance costs. Such companies will, he says, be able to go to their insurers and show that their health and safety systems and performance have been validated by "an independent non-profit making organisation".

Recalling that NISO has been setting standards for health and safety management systems and practice for the past 17 years through its Annual Safety Awards, Pierce Martin says the Organisation has introduced many innovations to the awards over that period.

Last year it piloted a new on-site assessment process for evaluating the effectiveness of health and safety practice, using a new benchmark methodology. Based on the results of this pilot, the new NISO Gold Standard was launched this year, as an integral part of the annual awards and as a stand-alone cost effective way of assessing a company's health and safety management processes.

The new Gold Standard provides an independent systematic evaluation of the company's health and safety management,

based on best practice, and makes key recommendations for corrective action. The NISO Gold Standard is validated by the NSAI and supported by members of the Irish Insurance Federation.

Explaining the scheme of the new Gold Standard, he says a number of its aspects differentiate it from other standards.

- Firstly, the assessment criteria of the NISO Gold Standard is built on a unique combination of the international EFQM "Quality-Assured" Rating System, together with a range of international health and safety standards and extensive international benchmarking experience. This enables strong health and safety management standards to be brought together with sound business excellence practices. In so doing, it also provides a structured and motivating on-site engagement/audit.
- Secondly, it is complementary to other management system methodologies, including those covering health and safety management.
- Thirdly, it provides a benchmark score that enables a company to compare its own health and safety management performance with the performances of those in its peer group. In providing a benchmark score, it goes beyond a simple pass/fail and allows for sectoral comparison. As part of its scoring, it also assesses sub-supplier and sub-contractor compliance.
- Fourthly, it provides a written report, identifying strengths and opportunities for improvement. This allows for a profile of strengths and weaknesses, permitting year-on-year comparisons. It also offers insights into emerging best practices within business sectors.

The assessment methodology has three levels of quality assurance: an evidence-based submission; on-site assessment by a qualified assessor; and external validation by the NSAI.



This level of quality assurance is highly valued by the insurance industry.

He adds that NISO uses its established regional network and its own training and information programmes to support the Gold Standard. The Gold Standard, he believes, provides coaching and mentoring on relevant health and safety management practices applying to different business sectors and in preparing submissions for the annual safety awards - highlighting the excellent work of the members of NISO's regional network through its independent, not-for-profit status.

Successful companies attaining the NISO Gold Standard will be awarded the NISO Gold Standard Certificate. The new Standard, therefore, offers both business and health and safety benefits for the company/organisation:

- It provides a comprehensive performance check of the health and safety management system and practices of the company against best Irish and international standards;
- It motivates managers and employees to know and apply the health and safety standards required for their businesses to comply with the law;
- Year-on-year improvements are demonstrated in health and safety management practices and performance to the Board, stakeholders, employees and clients/customers;
- Peer and public recognition for a company's commitment to operating a safe, healthy and successful business is achieved.

To find out more about the standard, visit www.niso.ie/nisogoldstandard

Work-related health surveillance: requirements to realisation

Employers are required, by the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, to ensure work-related health surveillance is made available, where the potential for risk to worker health exists. NISO's occupational health advisor, Siobhan Byrne, considers the issue.

Work-related health surveillance involves the systematic assessment of employees in order to detect the early indicators of illness and disease caused by workplace activity (HSE, 1999). Surveillance can involve the use of questionnaires, surveys, biological testing and medical examination of workers (ILO, 1998). The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 obliges employers to identify the need for health surveillance, on assessment of workplace health risk, to make surveillance available to full and part-time employees and to advise employees, on employment, of any surveillance requirements.

Specific health surveillance is required by regulation. Requirements are identified in regulations on children and young persons in the workplace, night and shift work, work involving vibration and noise and manual handling, among others (Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007). The ability of employers and workers to recognise and assess other health risks requiring action may be more problematic.

Work-related disease is difficult to identify and quantify in Ireland - and internationally the experience is similar (Takala, 2005). An analysis of data collection methods (Drummond, 2007) revealed that while the Health and Safety Authority collects injury statistics, there is no a centrally controlled method for collecting data on work-related diseases.

Managing what is not measured is problematic. Davis (2005) stresses the importance of understanding the severity and scale of identified health problems, since such knowledge will focus resources appropriately.

PILOT SCHEME ON LUNG AND SKIN DISEASE

Some advances have been made. The HSA is to report on employer compliance regarding work-related health surveillance, as identified during workplace inspections in 2007 (HSA, 2007). A pilot programme for the recording of lung and skin disease, run in 2005-2006, led to the documentation of 77 cases of work-related skin disease and 28 cases of work-related respiratory disease (see <http://www.medicine.manchester.ac.uk/coeh/thor/schemes/ireland> for more detail).

The data collection programme has now been funded by the HSA since 2007. Data gaps will remain, however, since the reporting programmes are limited to some physicians and the scope is restricted to reporting specified health conditions.

The dilemma for employers is that while they carry the responsibility for the protection of workers, evidence-based guidance on work-related diseases is very limited. Drummond (2007) recommends that non-occupational health professionals report illnesses and disease, while Davis (2005) recommends building on existing workplace structures to maximize the use of resources and the empowerment of stakeholders through education.

Workplace safety legislation currently requires management strategies, involving the identification of risk, risk control, worker representation, training and work-related health surveillance. Building on this established system might provide an efficient and cost effective model for the implementation of more accurate data collection especially in SMEs.

Such a system would require the development of tools to guide employees to self-report, guidance for workplace representatives and employers for data collation and retention, or reporting of data as required, and the development of any associated information and training for all involved.

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Fishing industry working on an unstable platform

Given the fact that fishing is the most dangerous way in the world to earn a livelihood, it is surprising that more public attention is not focused on the dangers of the industry, which in Ireland employs just over 5,000 people.

Last year 12 fishermen were killed at sea. Compare this with the two industries to which most attention is paid: agriculture and construction. In agriculture, an industry in which 110,000 people work, 11 people were killed, while 18 were killed in construction, an industry which employs 280,000. Measured on the standard rate of fatal accidents per 100,000 employed in the sector, the rate in fishing is 240, in agriculture 10 and in construction 6.4.

Given the efforts that are being made by responsible industry leaders to raise safety standards, supported by the HSA, BIM and the Marine Safety Directorate, it is disappointing that more public attention is not focused on safety in the industry, except at times of crisis.

Over recent years a number of industry-specific regulations aimed at promoting safety have been enacted as law. Before the end of the year the HSA is likely to issue, for consultation, a draft Code of Practice for the industry for employers of three or fewer workers. Given the structure of the Irish fishing fleet – there are over 1,500 boats of under 15 metres, each with a crew of three or less on board – the Code will be an important document.

THE UNSTABLE PLATFORM

One man who has a clear insight into the dangers facing those working in the fishing industry, is BIM executive Ray Murray, who is responsible for promoting the Board's safety efforts.

Explaining the structure of the Irish fishing industry, Murray says that most accidents would involve smaller inshore fishing vessels.

These are vessels of five metres or under in size - most of them under 12 metres. In relation to the safety of these vessels, Murray points out that most vessels are required to meet the standard set in the Maritime Safety Directorate's Code of Practice for vessels of various length.

As he puts it, the fishermen who work in these boats are "battling with the elements of the sea and economics". There are quota restrictions and there are pressures to keep crew numbers down. Some fishermen even work alone. For those unfamiliar with the fishing industry, he explains that inshore fishing vessels usually work within 12 nautical miles of the shore and usually return to port at night.

Describing the dangers facing fishermen, he uses a striking phrase. They are, he says, working in the hazardous environment of an "unstable platform", while trying to earn a living.

SAFETY INITIATIVES

Behind the grim picture painted by the fatality figures lies another, more encouraging, story: the efforts by those in the industry to improve safety standards.

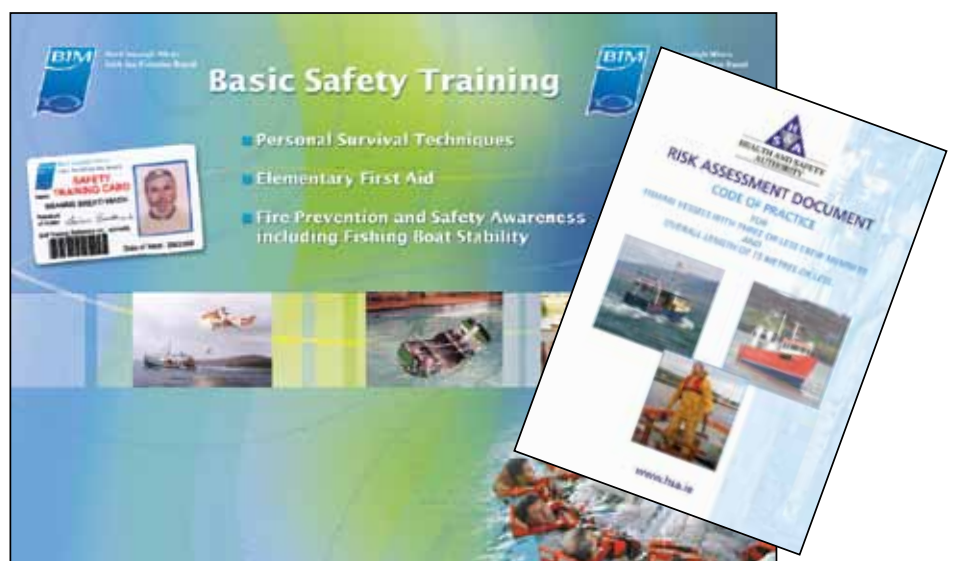
BIM has been closely involved in these initiatives. Murray describes BIM as being there to "support the fishing industry" in all ways, including improving safety standards.

An initiative that is currently underway and which has attracted some attention in health and safety circles is the development of a Code of Practice for employers with three or less crew on board. This initiative, which is being led by the HSA, is being actively supported by BIM. When the draft has been developed, it will be piloted in the South East and issued for public consultation.

A BIM-led initiative, which is underpinned by regulation, is the three-day training course which leads to a Fishing Safety Card. The course, which is FETAC-recognised, covers all aspects of safety at sea, from personal survival to slinging and crane operations. Murray explains that BIM "is the main training provider in the industry". Using what he says is a "unique mobile training unit", BIM is bringing training to fishing communities.

Another initiative, in which BIM has played a lead role, has been the development of the European Handbook for the Prevention of Accidents at Sea and the Safety of Fishermen. The book will be produced in 15 languages.

Also, at the level of the European Commission there are moves to have a 'Non-Binding Guide for the Protection of Workers on Vessels of 15 metres or under'. Effectively, such a guide would have the force of a directive, though it would not be a statutory measure.



Ergonomics improves productivity and quality

Leonard O’Sullivan, lecturer in ergonomics at the University of Limerick and membership secretary of the Irish Ergonomics Society, speaks to NISO UPDATE about the importance of ergonomics in the workplace and the role of the Society in promoting awareness of the subject.

Ergonomics is, O’Sullivan says, “a young science”, having been recognised as such only after World War II. Consequently the Irish Ergonomics Society is a young society, having been founded by his now-retired University of Limerick colleague, Dr Tim Galwey, in 1993.

Though young, the Society, which has about 80 members, is active. The Society’s website (www.ergonomics.ie) is a source of information on ergonomics for all who are interested in the subject. The Society was set up to promote awareness of ergonomics and to allow for the exchange of information concerning the characteristics of human beings, as such characteristics are applicable to the design of work-related systems and devices.

Apart from its website, the Society’s main vehicle for communicating with members and the wider health and safety community with an interest in ergonomics is its annual conference. This year the conference, which is scheduled to be held at the Marino Institute of Education on May 8, will be devoted to ‘Ergonomic Design in Education’.

IMPACT ON INDUSTRY

It is his role as a lecturer that gives O’Sullivan a unique and keen insight into what is happening in industry and the impact of ergonomics on health and safety in industry. As a lecturer in the Department of Manufacturing and Operations Engineering, which is part of the University’s Faculty of Science and Engineering, O’Sullivan teaches students across a range of courses, from the Certificate and Diploma courses in Health and Safety, through the BSc in Health and Safety



“Good quality workplace design is very important. It improves health and safety, productivity and quality”.

to masters and doctorate courses. As well as his lecturing duties in Limerick, O’Sullivan is the external ergonomics lecturer on the UCD BSc in Health and Safety.

He believes that the students coming through these courses are having a huge impact on industry and raising standards. There is, he says, “a lot of expertise out there”. Many of the students, particularly those who have come through at masters and doctoral level, are having a strategic impact and are very much involved in formulating policy at a high level. What is happening in ergonomics is mirrored in broader health and safety education. There are now a number of degree programmes across Ireland.

ERGONOMIC ISSUES

As O’Sullivan talks about the ergonomic issues facing Irish industry, it is clear that manual handling tops the list. He mentions the recently-published study on manual handling in the healthcare sector (Analysis of the Causes and Costs of Manual Handling Incidents in the Health Care Sector by Dockrell, Johnson and Ganly: published by the HSA), saying that the costs associated with manual handling injuries “are quite considerable”.

Developing the theme, he warns that “we cannot eliminate all manual handling”. Therefore, he says, we need to ensure that training is effective. When choosing manual

handling trainers, employers need to have regard to the ability of the trainer to train, the trainer’s background and the content of the training material. He mentions a court case where the trainer’s competence was in issue.

Another issue impacting on industry, one that is not mentioned much now, is RSI, which he says is “a significant cost to industry”. He mentions that sedentary office work has its own problems.

An issue mentioned by O’Sullivan is the link between stress and physical effort. The psychosocial mix can, he says, elevate risk. And then there is the difficulty of demonstrating the causal effect of manual handling, RSI and strain injuries - unlike something like noise, which is clearly identifiable.

For those looking for information on ergonomics, beyond the Irish Ergonomic Society’s website, O’Sullivan encourages those seeking information to visit the HSA’s website (www.hsa.ie) and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work’s website (www.osha.europa.eu).

But it is perhaps O’Sullivan’s final words that pack the most impact, when he says “Good quality workplace design is very important. It improves health and safety, productivity and quality”.



Answers to Questions

Question 1

I own a small engineering company in the West and employ 11 men and two women in the office. I have heard a little about some new health and safety regulations that came out last year that cover all sorts of areas at work, which I believe may apply to me. Where can I find out more about them?

Answer 1

These Regulations are called General Application Regulations 2007. They became law on November 1, 2007, and they apply to all employers. They are very comprehensive and simplify, update or replace 25 existing sets of Regulations, including the earlier General Application Regulations 1993. The Regulations contain eight parts and ten schedules, as follows:

Part 1 – Interpretation and General

Part 2 – Workplace and Use of Work Equipment

- Chapter 1 – Workplace
- Chapter 2 – Use of Work Equipment
- Chapter 3 – Personal Protective Equipment
- Chapter 4 – Manual Handling of Loads
- Chapter 5 – Display Screen Equipment

Part 3 – Electricity

Part 4 – Work at Height

Part 5 – Physical Agents

- Chapter 1 – Control of Noise at Work
- Chapter 2 – Control of Vibration at Work

Part 6 – Sensitive Risk Groups

- Chapter 1 – Protection of Children and Young Persons
- Chapter 2 – Protection of Pregnant,

Post Natal and Breastfeeding Employees

Chapter 3 – Night Work and Shift work

Part 7 – Safety Signs and First-Aid

Chapter 1 – Safety Signs at Places of Work

Chapter 2 – First-Aid

Part 8 – Explosive Atmospheres at Places of Work

Schedules

- Schedule 1 – Requirements for Work Equipment
- Schedule 2 – Personal Protective Equipment
- Schedule 3 – Risk Factors for Manual Handling of Loads
- Schedule 4 – Minimum Requirements for all Display Screen Equipment
- Schedule 5 – Inspection of Work Equipment
- Schedule 6 – Hand-Arm Vibration and Whole-Body Vibration
- Schedule 7 – Protection of Children and Young Persons
- Schedule 8 – Lists of Agents, Processes and Working Conditions Relating to Pregnant, Post Natal and Breastfeeding Employees
- Schedule 9 – Safety and Health Signs at Work
- Schedule 10 – Explosive Atmospheres

They are very comprehensive and the HSA has taken huge steps to help employers get to grips with them.

Firstly, they have produced very detailed guidance on all of the sections and this guidance can be downloaded from their website: <http://www.hsa.ie>. Once you get to their home page, you will see Quick Links on the left hand side, if you click on General Application Regulations 2007 it will open up a page where you can download each section of the Guidance one by one, or print them off if you like.

Secondly, the Health and Safety Authority have produced a Safety Toolkit, which is also a short guide to the Regulations aimed specifically at small businesses. There is an icon relating to this on their home page and once you get to that specific page, again you can decide to either download the Toolkit or buy it at €15 a copy. I know many small businesses that have done both. The booklet that you buy is a very compact publication with a wire spiral and comes with a range of very useful, easy to use checklists that will enable you to comply.

Further information is available from NISO on 01-4659760 – when answered, choose Option 4 to receive expert advice on health and safety. You can also contact the Health and Safety Authority's Workplace Contact Unit on 1890-289389.

It may seem daunting and very large in relation to your small company but it is manageable and all sorts of assistance is available out there to help you to comply.

Question 2

Our concern is manual handling and back injuries. We have given staff manual handling training, but we still have staff injuring themselves and being out of work. What else can we do?

Answer 2

While training in manual handling is very useful - and I am not dismissing it completely - we need to ask some other questions about how you are handling goods and moving loads, before we discuss training at all.

Firstly, have you carried out detailed risk assessments of the manual handling tasks your staff are engaged in?

If you have not, then that is where you should start. If you don't have the competence to do that internally, then NISO can find an expert to do it for you, for a fee. These risk assessments, and others covering the work

there, need to be done, as they form part of the Safety Statement that you have to have. This has been a legal requirement since 1989 and was repeated and expanded in the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

If you have carried out these risk assessments, what did they tell you about possible control measures over and above (and before training)?

Hopefully, they pointed to reviewing how you receive goods and the size, bulk and other aspects of the boxes or drums you are receiving. They should suggest that you look at increasing the use of mechanical lifting aids, which can be as simple as hand trucks, flat bed trolleys or pallet trucks. Equally, it can also refer to forklift trucks, cranes, conveyor belts etc., depending on the nature of your business and your manual handling tasks.

Were the employees, who do the work, consulted during the preparation of these risk assessments to see (a) what their problems are and (b) to seek 'on the ground' solutions from them?

In the past, the emphasis was on the provision of training without necessarily looking at the

bigger picture about what are we moving, how are we moving it, to where, how often, who is moving it etc.

Now the approach is more inclusive, with the ultimate aim of reducing the amount and scale of lifting performed by staff altogether. Even when we provide training, there is still a risk every time a member of staff lifts.

Let us go back to the training you have provided. We need to determine the following facts about it:

Was the trainer competent? Was he/she an accredited manual handling instructor and did you seek evidence of this qualification? If the instructor is not competent, then you must seek out an instructor who is properly qualified. You may decide to train one of your own staff to become an in-house manual handling instructor and if this is what you need, NISO can provide this training – see www.niso.ie

Did they provide both theoretical and practical training? All properly-delivered manual handling training must contain both the theoretical and practical side, in that participants must actually demonstrate lifting techniques during the training, under the

supervision and instruction of the trainer. This practical element should, if it is to be done properly, relate to the actual lifting tasks being performed in the company and should take place, if possible, on the shop floor. This makes the training highly relevant and meaningful for the trainees.

Did they evaluate the effectiveness of the training? Was there any evaluation form used at the end of the session, to determine just what the trainees had learned and how they were going to put it into practice when they went back to work?

Did management within the company reinforce the training afterwards? Once a trainer has finished he/she leaves the building and has no idea if the lifting techniques delivered are ever implemented. That is the job of each line manager or team leader to ensure. There is no point training staff and then just allowing them to carry on as if they were never trained.

(Mary Darlington, B.Sc OccS&H, CFIOSH, FCIPD, is a NISO associate, providing health and safety advice to NISO members. Mary can be contacted by email at info@darlington.ie)

NISO Shop

The NISO shop allows people to search through all upcoming NISO training courses, seminars and workshops online and to proceed through to online booking and paying for the required number of places.

Safety products, including training props and CDs on up-to-date safety legislation are also available to purchase.

Check it out at www.niso.ie



NISO in the midlands: health and safety in the community

When she speaks about NISO in the Midlands region, Chris McCormack captures the essence of NISO: the part the voluntary organisation plays in promoting awareness and knowledge of occupational health and safety in the community.

And as she speaks, she also captures something else: the positive, co-operative, friendly nature of the people who make up the safety community.

McCormack, who is secretary of the NISO Midlands Region organisation, a post which she has filled for a number of years, speaks about the "style" of NISO in the Midlands. She talks about the dedicated service of Jim Shaw and John Flanagan, whom she describes as being personally very good with people and imparting information and advice. "The pair have", she says, "provided the region with stability."

Their contribution is enhanced by the contribution of another long-time committee member, the current treasurer, Bertie Guinan, and by that of the regional development officer Dr Sean Reidy from the Athlone Institute of Technology, whose knowledge of local industry is invaluable.

And in the last year, four new members have joined the Midlands Region Committee. McCormack says their membership "has doubled our abilities". She describes the Midlands Regional Committee as being very interested in its work, "with members never missing a meeting".

WIDESPREAD MEMBERSHIP

Another aspect of the structure of the Midlands Region that McCormack talks about - and one that she believes is special - is the mix of members. Members are, she says,

drawn from a range and size of companies, "from multinationals to family-based businesses".

Much of the membership has been built up by personal relationships. Many of the members of the Midlands Region Committee are well known to the businesses in the area and the region also has strong links with educational centres. The links to the educational centres help to bring in new members. .



At the moment the region is, like other NISO regions, "trying to broaden our membership". McCormack says that "often it takes time for businesses to join". They will attend courses, they will use the website and gradually, as they find out what NISO offers them, they go on over time to become members.

McCormack believes that there is an growing "awareness of NISO", with businesses appreciating "the independence of NISO as an advice-giving body".

SPREADING KNOWLEDGE

Many a member of NISO has joined the organisation after attending a NISO Foundation Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety course. In the Midlands Region, NISO runs courses at the Athlone Institute of Technology, Tullamore VEC and Longford VEC. The organisation works closely with the education centres, which provide both administrative space and support.

As well as making NISO known to businesses in the region, the courses run by NISO bring the organisation into contact with influential public figures. Recently the Minister for Finance, Brian Cowen, has presented certificates to students who successfully completed the certificate course. Even more recently, Mary O'Rourke, T.D., who amongst her many achievements, holds the distinction of having had responsibility for health and safety as Minister for Labour Affairs, has presented students with their certificates.

The fact that the NISO Midlands Region Committee can get such high-profile public figures to attend their awards ceremony is a testament to NISO's importance in the local community. But more importantly, it gives the members of the Midlands committee the chance to put the case for health and safety to public figures who can make a difference.

As well as the Foundation course, the Midlands region also runs training courses and seminars. To coincide with the region's recent annual general meeting, the committee organised a breakfast seminar. There were two topics on the agenda: directors' and senior managers' responsibilities and the General Application Regulations 2007.

The HSA's programme manager, Dr P J Claffey, who was in charge of writing the Authority's *Guidance for Directors and Senior Managers on their Responsibilities for Workplace Safety* and Health spoke on that topic, while Chris McCormack took on the task of explaining the new General Application Regulations.

But perhaps the NISO activity that brings the health and safety message to the widest audience is the NISO quiz. For 25 years now, John Flanagan has been the quiz master in the Midlands Region. The enduring popularity of the quiz is attested to by the fact that this year over a dozen teams took part, half of them from SME firms.

NATIONAL IRISH SAFETY ORGANISATION - UPCOMING EVENTS – www.niso.ie**South Region Safety Quiz**

scheduled 27 March 2008 at 19:30

Location: Silver Springs Moran Hotel, Cork<http://www.niso.ie/Events/TableQuiz/tabid/146/Default.aspx>**VDU/DSE Assessors Course (2 Days)**

scheduled 26th/27th March

Location: NISO, Ballymount, Dublin 12

scheduled 6th/7th May

Fee: Member €600 Non Member €750**To book:** www.niso.ie Email: info@niso.ie Tel: 01 4659760**NISO Occupational Safety & Health Certificate**

(for 8 weeks, 2pm-6pm)

Commencing 31st March

Location: Marino Institute of Education, Dublin 9**Fee:** Member €500 Non Member €550**To book:** www.niso.ie Email: info@niso.ie Tel: 01 4659760**Seminar - Lock Out Tag Out**

scheduled April 2008

Location: Galway**Seminar - Implications of REACH for the End User**

scheduled 10 April 2008 at 13:30

Location: Citywest Hotel, Saggart, Co Dublin**All Ireland Quiz Finals**

scheduled for 12 April 2008 at 13:30

Location: Radisson Hotel, Limerick<http://www.niso.ie/Events/TableQuiz/tabid/146/Default.aspx>**Seminar - Health & Safety for Directors & Senior Managers (8.30-12.30)**

scheduled 15th April

Location: Marino Institute of Education, Dublin 9**Fee:** €145**To book:** www.niso.ie Email: info@niso.ie Tel: 01 4659760**Seminar - Fire Safety & Evacuation Management**

scheduled 16 April 2008 from

14:00 to 16:30

Location: Oriel House Hotel, Ballincollig, Co Corkhttp://www.niso.ie/Training/Seminars/tabid/155/Default.aspx?evt=23&nmx=1_1**Seminar – SHWW 2005 Act and General Application Regulations 2007 Update (0830-1230)**

scheduled 22nd April

Location: NISO, Ballymount, Dublin 12

scheduled 22nd June

Location: Marino Institute of Education, Dublin 9**Fee:** €145**To book:** www.niso.ie Email: info@niso.ie Tel: 01 4659760**AGM 2008**

scheduled 23 April 2008 at 12:00

Location: Buswells Hotel,
Molesworth Street, Dublin 2<http://www.niso.ie/Events/AGMs/tabid/148/Default.aspx>**Safety Awards Closing Date**

scheduled for 2 May 2008

<http://www.niso.ie/Events/AnnualOSAWards/tabid/164/Default.aspx>**Seminar - Directors and Senior Managers Responsibilities for Workplace Health and Safety**

scheduled May 2008

Location: Galway**First Aid Competition**

scheduled for 24 May 2008 at 09:00

Location: Civil Defence Headquarters,
Wolfe Tone Quay, Dublin 8<http://www.niso.ie/Events/FirstAidCompetition/tabid/156/Default.aspx>**Safety Awards Extended Closing Date**

scheduled for 30 May 2008

<http://www.niso.ie/Events/AnnualOSAWards/tabid/164/Default.aspx>**Seminar - Bullying in the Workplace; Prevention and Management Strategies**

scheduled June 2008

Location: Galway**NISO Golf Outing**

scheduled 11 June 2008 from 11:00

Location: The Heritage at Killenard

Tee-off times from 11.00 hrs to 13.00 hrs.

13 x 4 ball scheduled at 10 minute intervals.

<http://www.niso.ie/Events/GolfClassic/tabid/149/Default.aspx>**Seminar - Workings of PIAB and the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004**

scheduled 12 June 2008 from 07:30 to 11:00

Speakers: PIAB Speaker on the Workings of PIAB; Peter Lennon (Lennon Header Solicitors) on the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004**NISO Annual Conference, Safety Exhibition & Awards Presentation Dinner**

scheduled for 16 October 2008 to 17 October 2008

Location: Knightsbrook Hotel, Trim, Co Meath

Further details and a brochure on most of the events above can be found on the
NISO Website www.niso.ie