



Health & Safety

# MATTERS

Health & Safety Information for GMB Safety Reps

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## HSE: The first visible effects of the cuts

### Introduction

It can be difficult to spot exactly how cuts across the public services will affect working people in their entirety, and with so many announcements across a broad range of services it is easy to miss important news. The changes proposed by the HSE on how employers report RIDDOR and how both employers and workers get information from the HSE are as a result of the 35% reduction in spending that the HSE have to implement over four years.

### What exactly is being proposed?

The HSE Infoline telephone service which offers advice on workplace health and safety will end on 30<sup>th</sup> September. The over 250,000 users annually are being asked to turn to the HSE website as an alternative. In addition from 12<sup>th</sup> September employers will only have one method, online, with which to report over 3 day injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences under RIDDOR. They can still notify the HSE on fatalities and major injuries by phone. Apparently this change will save £7million over 5 years by not replacing the existing provider as the contract ends.

### Is this a logical approach?

The process leading up to the decision seems flawed to say the least. In early 2010 the HSE sought “expressions of interest” in replacing the Infoline and the Incident Control Centre. Interested parties had to return a pre-qualification form by April 2010 with the winner of a 3 year contract to be announced in December that year. However, in October the HSE said it was now scrapping the process in favour of a web based model instead. In mitigation it should be noted that online RIDDOR reports were increasing in number, up from 21% in 2004 to 55% in 2010. The other methods of reporting were:

- Telephone – 19%
- E mail – 15%
- Post - 8%
- Fax - 2%

As can be seen, if email is added to the web reporting, 7 out of 10 reports are currently made electronically. Closer analysis shows that only 20% of online reports cover diseases and dangerous occurrences. This would reinforce the assumption that employers report accidents, as they are legally bound to, while workers and the public report dangerous working practices – mainly by phone! It is also clear that workers can use a phone easier and with greater anonymity and with less fear of being victimised.

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## GMB SAFETY REPS

Making Your Workplace Safer

[Insert Name]  
[Insert Address]  
[Insert Address]  
[Insert Address]  
[Insert PostCode]

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## What effects could scrapping the Infoline have?

The HSE website has 26 million visitors a year, over 100 times that of the phone line, and claims it has a 93% satisfaction rating. There are also claims that a *significant* proportion of calls are non HSE related - estimated as up to one in 8 in this category. The bulk of these may relate to Local Authority enforcement areas on which the public will not necessarily draw a distinction. The changing funding situation across local authorities could also mean that there will be varying, inconsistent approaches from them with the impact impossible to forecast yet. Where the HSE previously could talk of a single point of contact there are now real fears that the first reference point could be the newly set up register of (private) consultants.

## Are there other areas of concern?

Workers with limited English language skills will lose the telephone interpreting service in 100 plus languages. So far there is no decision on language provision, but they will be mindful of the language provision when making the transition. Those employers who do not have access to electronic communication are being directed to post offices and libraries (themselves under threat) and it fails to suggest how non office based workers can access communication while at work. There will be a telephone number displayed on some web pages for complex enquiries that have exhausted the available advice online.

## A summary of the HSE position

In summation the HSE position is that:

- Resources are limited and need to be allocated in securing the best returns
- Infoline staff only gave out information that was available on the HSE website
- The website has improved and will continue to do so
- Web based information is the way we live now!

## Conclusion

These changes are obviously one way in which the HSE feels that it can make cuts with the least detrimental impact. However it should be noted that while there is no doubt that the HSE website is both informative and useful, still over 236.000 people contacted the Infoline by phone and 50,000 more contacted them by post in the previous year. GMB members, who have good access to trained safety representatives and officers, would probably use the Infoline less often than other workers who would not have similar support. The biggest fear is for those without access to any health and safety expertise, or decent technology, is that they will be unable to access the information they require, never mind being able to understand it and then act on it. For further information on this or other H&S issues contact [Daniel.shears@gmb.org.uk](mailto:Daniel.shears@gmb.org.uk) or [john.mcclean@gmb.org.uk](mailto:john.mcclean@gmb.org.uk)

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General Secretary  
**Paul Kenny**  
GMB  
22-24 Worple Road  
London SW19 4DD