

School of Life Sciences

First Health and Safety Committee Meeting

18th October 2005

Present

Gail Alexander (GA; Chair), Irene Blair (IB), Monica Lacey (ML), Lisa Grayson (LG; Minutes), Letty Gibson (LMG), Kiran Oza (KO), Aileen Watson (AW), Andrew Newman (AN), Janette Cordiner (JC), Magnus Alphey (MA).

Apologies

Stella Mitchell.

Paper A

ACTION

1. Committee Membership and Terms of Reference

GA welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the H&S Committee and did the initial introductions. Donald Gardiner and Andrew Ferenbach's absence was noted.

GA summarised the remit of the Committee, as previously issued to each member, and emphasised that, primarily, it will be a forum for exchange of information between H&S personnel and other staff.

2. SLS H&S Portfolio

GA drew attention to the H&S Portfolio (Paper A) and LG demonstrated how to access it via the SLS H&S web site. Not all Committee members were familiar with the document. LG explained that it is issued only to new starts, however, any member of SLS personnel can access it via the web. LG also pointed out that it applies to all personnel and not just laboratory staff. Committee members were invited to comment on the document and submit suggestions for additions/amendments to LG.

All

GA asked LG to email the H&S web site URL to each Committee member so they can add it to their Favourites.

LG

3. H&S Induction Training

GA reminded the Committee members of the requirement for each new start to complete a Basic Training Checklist. LG demonstrated how to access the Checklist and associated documentation on the H&S web site. LG invited the Committee members to submit suggestions for additions/amendments to the Checklist.

All

GA also reminded the Committee that new starts must attend the SLS H&S Induction Seminar. LG showed the Induction Seminar page on the H&S web site and introduced the plan to break it down into smaller subject specific presentations that existing staff will also be invited to attend.

The issue of poor attendance at H&S training events was discussed. MA suggested that PIs should be obliged to send at least one member of their group to H&S training events because if it is purely voluntary, people will not turn up. KO suggested using VLE. LG pointed out that this had already been suggested by Will Whitfield, and taken on board, but she had yet to learn how to use the system. KO offered his assistance. KO also offered to assist in the process of getting H&S training video footage into different VLE compatible formats. LG to arrange a meeting with KO to discuss this further. GA thanked KO.

LG/KO

LG asked the Committee members to submit suggestions for future H&S training.

All

4. Accidents & Incidents

IB explained the current Accident/Incident Reporting procedure and the requirement to complete Accident Investigation forms when more information is required. IB also stressed the importance of near miss reporting.

AN enquired as to who makes the decisions on whether remedial action is taken or not taken, referring specifically to people slipping in the WTB atrium when the floor is wet and, apparently, nothing being done about it. IB retorted that very few reports relating to this type of incident have been filed, and those that have been received were acted upon immediately. (Absorbent mats are now in place; broly bags are available from Reception and the Above Floor Cleaner is instructed to deal with wet/slippy areas as matter of priority.) The H&S Working Group (H&SWG) analyse all incident/accident reports and determine what remedial action is required and how best to implement it.

LG showed the location of the Accident/Incident pages on the H&S web site and drew attention to the "Lessons to be learned" section. Committee agreed that this information is important and should be brought to the attention of staff via regular emails. LG said this had already been discussed and she will ensure this is done from now on. KO suggested other methods of bringing important H&S news to the attention of all personnel, including using the 37 inch LCD screens that will eventually be sited at WTB & CIR Receptions. LG to discuss this with Debbie Hill when the facility becomes available.

LG

LG

5. Risk Assessment

LG gave a quick demonstration of the SLS Risk Assessment Database System for the benefit of those who had not seen it before. GA asked if LG could issue access instructions along with the minutes of this meeting.

LG

MA commented that he was unaware of this system and thought it was a useful resource that should be better publicised. LG explained that, at the moment, only certain groups of support staff are using the system, but it will gradually be rolled out to all personnel.

GA informed the Committee that, in order to comply with University policy, we are currently preparing generic stress risk assessments for staff groups within the School. When the final drafts are complete and the issue has been discussed at the H&S Management Committee, the relevant draft will be sent to representatives of the various staff groups for comment.

GA

6. Lone/Out-of-Hours Working

GA asked the Committee members to forward any comments on the Lone & Out-of-Hours Working documents (Paper B) to LG. The logistics of how the policy would be implemented were discussed. LG explained that this would go to the H&S Management Committee (H&SMC) for final approval prior to implementation.

IB explained the shortcomings of the current out-of-hours signing-in books and informed the Committee of the Working Group's proposal to scrap them. KO asked if electronic alternatives, i.e. using the proximity card reading system, had been investigated. IB and LG explained why they did not think the proximity card reading system offered a solution to the problem. GA suggested this be examined in more detail by the H&SWG.

H&SWG

7. Items from Committee Members

- i. Stella Mitchell asked that the Committee be made aware of the ongoing problem in the Anatomy & Forensic Anthropology offices. IB explained that the staff in that area are continually being subjected to a variety of noxious smells and fumes coming into their offices via the air supply vents. IB assured the Committee that the situation is being closely monitored and she is applying pressure on E&B to come up with a solution as soon as possible. Safety Services are aware of the issue and Ian Leith is being kept informed.
- ii. AW was asked by a member of staff to raise the issue of undergraduate students wearing lab coats in the area where the vending machines are located in MSI. Staff seem to find this particularly offensive as these students are coming out from the dissection labs into an area where food and drink is being handled and consumed. IB said that she would raise this issue with Sue Black.
- iii. LMG expressed concerns over the number of lab staff wearing gloves in non-laboratory areas. IB acknowledged that this was an on-going problem. Committee agreed that it was important for senior staff to lead by example and all staff should feel free to politely ask anyone wearing gloves in non-lab areas to remove them.

IB

- iv. The previous item lead on to discussions about the increase in traffic through lab areas now that CIR is up and running. All Committee members agreed that the absence of proper corridors made this inevitable and there did not appear to be an easy solution. Staff have been instructed to go between WTB and CIR Receptions via the outside of the building, but it is likely that this will be ignored. MA commented that it is important for people to be aware of the hazards in the laboratories through which they are travelling and take more care. Committee agreed that this was especially important for non-lab staff, e.g. admin/clerical, who have started walking through lab areas that they are not familiar with. LG said there have been several complaints about this and it will be on the agenda of the next H&SMC meeting. **LG**
- v. MA had been asked by the PostDocs to raise several issues, two of which had already been covered (see item iii and iv above). There were an additional three items.
- a. MA asked if the safety showers in WTB had ever been cleaned and tested. IB said no, safety showers were not included in Estates & Building's routine chlorination and testing program. IB has raised this in the past and is concerned that there may be risk of someone contracting Legionnaire's disease. IB to revisit this issue with Estates & Buildings. LG advised that safety showers only be used when absolutely necessary. If circumstances allow, it is preferable to get the victim to one of the showers off the WTB atrium, on floors 2 and M, or the shower off CIR Reception. These showers are/will be regularly chlorinated. LG pointed out that the eye wash showers can be used on other parts of the body. This is the intention in CIR where no standard safety showers are available. LG to confirm the situation in CIR with Terry Sweeney and inform staff of the arrangements. **IB**
LG
- b. MA said there had been several complaints about the lack of castors on the lab chairs in CIR. Apart from the inconvenience, staff who were used to chairs fitted with castors feel they are at risk of injury when using the castor-less chairs. LG explained that the company supplying the chairs would not supply them with castors for H&S reasons. When Safety Services was asked for an opinion they recommended that the industry standard is adhered to, i.e. fit glides rather than castors. LMG pointed out that there is an added complication: if SLS choose to ignore the H&S advice and procure castors from another source, the instant they are fitted the chair's five year warranty will be invalidated. LG said this item has already been tabled on the agenda of the next H&SMC meeting, in the hope that the senior managers will make the final decision. **H&SMC**
- c. MA also expressed concerns over the wide-spread blasé attitude towards H&S that is apparent within the School and asked if there is anything that can be done about it. He suggested that regular inspection might encourage people to take health & safety more seriously. IB said the H&S Working Group do carry out inspections but, so far, they have been restricted to certain areas, i.e. liquid nitrogen facilities and TC suites. The H&SWG will endeavour to carry out more frequent inspections in all areas. LG pointed out that, as documented in the SLS H&S Policy, Pls are responsible for H&S within their own group and they must take their H&S obligations seriously and lead by example in order for the H&S culture to change. LMG acknowledged that Lab Managers also have an important H&S role to play. Committee agreed that this was another item for the H&SMC. **H&SWG**
H&SMC
- vi. KO expressed concerns over the safety of IT support staff operating in laboratory environments. H&SWG members thought that, as a minimum, IT staff should be wearing lab coats and, when appropriate, also gloves and safety glasses. LG said their activities should be risk assessed and through this process the controls required to ensure they operate safely can be established. LG asked if KO could ask a member of his staff to list what they perceive to be the key hazards and risks associated with their work activities. LG will then use this as the basis for the risk assessment. **KO/LG**

8. AOCB

There was no other business.