

Industry and government set new bar for workplace health

A new framework has been launched to raise the standards of physical and mental health at work, within the chemicals and major hazards industries.

The new Principles of Workplace Health and Wellbeing Leadership have been officially launched today (24 June) at the House of Lords at an event hosted by Lord Ian McNicol and sponsored by Baroness Brenda Dacres OBE. The launch event featured an address by the Minister for Social Security and Disability, Sir Stephen Timms, who spoke on the importance of preventing work-related ill health, keeping people in work and growing the economy.

The principles were developed by the onshore Chemicals and Major Hazards working group, as a response to Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Prevention Programme, to place clear accountability on senior leaders, building on the model established for process safety leadership following the 2005 Buncefield tragedy.

The working group involved HSE alongside trade associations, unions and employers, including the Chemical Business Association, Chemical Industries Association, GMB Union, Grain LNG, National Gas, Tank Storage Association, Unite the Union and Yorkshire Water.

The launch of the principles reflects a shared commitment to preventing work-related ill health through the sharing of best practice and key learnings to drive continuous improvement. The Principles were built on a proven model following the Buncefield incident in 2005. Industry developed the Process Safety Leadership Principles, which have since become a foundational standard across onshore and offshore major hazard sites. The same rigour is now being applied to occupational health.

The initiative also aligns with Sir Charlie Mayfield's Keep Britain Working review, reinforcing a cross-government approach to reducing the economic and human cost of preventable work-related ill health.

Minister for Social Security and Disability, Sir Stephen Timms, said: "The launch of the Principles of Workplace Health and Wellbeing Leadership marks an important step towards improving health and wellbeing in the onshore chemicals and major hazards industry. I welcome its clear focus on preventing work-related ill health. Working together, we can create healthier workplaces, support economic growth and raise living standards."

Ken Rivers, Non-Executive Board Member for the Health and Safety Executive, said: "These Principles of Workplace Health and Wellbeing Leadership represent a significant step forward in how we approach occupational health across the major hazard industries. By bringing together regulators, industry leaders and trade unions, we have created a framework that builds on the sector's proven track record in process safety leadership. I am pleased

to have contributed to this collaborative effort, which I believe will help businesses protect their most valuable asset; their people.”

Peter Davidson, CEO of the Tank Storage Association, said: “The Tank Storage Association has played an active role in the Working Group since its inception. These principles reflect our firm commitment to workforce wellbeing and cross-industry collaboration. I am proud to support this important initiative on behalf of the bulk storage and energy infrastructure sector.”

Luke Collins, National Health and Safety Advisor, Unite Central Office, said: “Work-related ill health remains one of the greatest challenges facing workplaces across Great Britain. These Principles rightly recognise that protecting workers’ health and wellbeing requires visible leadership, meaningful worker engagement, competent management, and a relentless focus on prevention. Unite strongly supports the principle that workplace health must be given the same priority as safety, with board-level accountability and effective trade union and workforce involvement at its heart. By working collaboratively, sharing learning, and focusing on both leading and lagging indicators, employers, workers, and trade unions can help prevent harm, improve wellbeing, and create healthier, more productive workplaces for all. From a personal perspective, it is great to be involved with an initiative that is driven by likeminded, supportive professionals aiming towards the same goal; healthier workplaces!”

Clare Middleton, Head of Safety, Health & Wellbeing, National Gas, said: “This document is a really strong step forward in helping organisations take a more thoughtful and proactive approach to health and wellbeing. It clearly reinforces that looking after people isn’t just the right thing to do - but it also drives better performance and resilience across the business. I particularly value the emphasis on visible leadership, early intervention, and genuine workforce involvement, as these are the areas that truly make a difference in practice. Overall, it provides a practical and encouraging framework that supports organisations in creating healthier, more engaged workplaces while reducing risk and improving long-term outcomes.

Simon Culkin, Managing Director, Grain LNG, said: “The Workplace Health and Wellbeing Leadership Principles provide businesses with a structured approach on how to both manage and measure the health and wellbeing of their employees. Grain LNG are proud to have been involved in helping to develop these principles and help close the gap between safety and health in industry, and in doing so, raise the standard of this important area.

Stephen Elliott, Chief Executive of the Chemical Industries Association, said: “The future of our industry is built on people – their energy, creativity, and resilience. These Workplace Health & Wellbeing Principles are a call to action in shaping workplaces where every individual can flourish. By embracing wellbeing as a shared commitment, we unlock potential, spark innovation, and create a culture that inspires pride and purpose. Together, we can lead the way in setting a new standard – one where thriving people drive thriving businesses,”

Susan Gee, Head of Occupational Health & Wellbeing, Yorkshire

Water, said: "At Yorkshire Water, protecting the health and wellbeing of our people is a core business priority, not an optional extra. We recognise the significant impact that work-related ill health can have on individuals, their families and the wider economy, and we are committed to acting early to prevent harm wherever possible. Through ongoing investment in workplace health, open reporting of concerns and a strong focus on understanding and managing health risks, we aim to create a working environment where every colleague has the best possible opportunity to stay well and thrive at work."

Tim Doggett, Chief Executive, Chemical Business Association, said: "People are our greatest asset, and health and safety has always been at the heart of what we do. We were pleased to play an active role in the development of these Principles of Workplace Health & Wellbeing Leadership, which provide a practical framework for creating workplaces where people feel supported, listened to and valued. The Principles reinforce the vital role that leadership, culture and workforce engagement play in promoting positive wellbeing and building stronger organisations. Investing in the health and wellbeing of our workforce is not simply the right thing to do; it is a shared responsibility that helps create safer, more inclusive and supportive workplaces for everyone."

Lynsey Mann, National Health, Safety and Environment Officer, GMB, said: "GMB are pleased to have played a part in the development of these Principles and strongly welcome their introduction. They mark an important step forward in strengthening leadership and raising standards for workplace health and wellbeing across the onshore chemicals and major hazards sectors, helping to ensure that workers in these industries are protected. We hope representatives from other industries will replicate this work in their sector working groups too."

Ends

Note: HSE's Prevention Programme is industry-led programme aiming to reduce work-related ill health. It brings together over 90 leaders from across industry, trade associations and unions to drive genuine culture change in how workplaces manage health risks, treating them with the same rigour currently applied to safety.

HSE brings 10 sectors together and supports collective action, creating the conditions for progress. Industry leaders are best placed to drive improvement within their own sectors, using shared learning and peer influence to embed change in a practical and lasting way.