

International Women's Day: 'Louder voice' from women will help everyone at work, watchdog bosses say

Two of the Government's most senior officials regulating industry believe the 'louder voice' from a new generation of women will make everyone at work feel more comfortable.

Sarah Albon and Lisa Pinney MBE say that while progress has been made, women working in heavy industry today are still provided with ill-fitting protective equipment and unsuitable welfare facilities while working on site.

The chief executives of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Coal Authority respectively, regulating traditionally male-dominated sectors, were speaking ahead of International Women's Day.

"As more and more women join these industries, they'll become a louder voice," said Sarah Albon, who leads HSE.



Lisa Pinney (centre) with Sarah Albon (right)

"With just little bit of thought – and you see our best companies do this – more places can make those extra few steps, not to make a woman feel that she has to ask, or somebody is doing her a favour, but just to make her feel as comfortable and on an equal footing with all of her male colleagues," she continued.

Improving conditions on site will benefit men too, Sarah Albon added: "Because when I look at some of these sites, I'd say it's not suitable for anyone. But it's the fact that women are coming in and looking at it, perhaps with 21st century eyes and saying, 'you expect me to put up with that?' "

"Men have perhaps just become ingrained and used to it in those heavy industries over decades and decades. But that right to have dignity at work, it applies to all of us, men and women."



“You feel like you’re wearing a tent”

Lisa Pinney, chief executive of the Coal Authority, sympathised with how difficult not being comfortable at work can be. “It’s so much about confidence. If you’re meeting on site or if you’re doing something and you’ve got sleeves down to the floor and feel like you’re wearing a tent, it really affects your confidence in terms of being able to do the best job that you can do.”

Both women started their careers when they were in a significant minority, and overcame barriers to progress.

But the inequality once denied Lisa a job: “I didn’t get a job once because they didn’t have women’s toilets. I was the top candidate, but they wouldn’t have me on site.”

“We have come a long way”, added Sarah, “but we’ve still got a long way to go.”



A-Winning, in Derbyshire

Enabling Net Zero

A wide-ranging discussion between the pair covered a range of different topics including the role each organisation plays in protecting the environment. They were talking at a site run by the Coal Authority, where water from abandoned mines was being treated before entering the wider water system.

Sarah Albon said: “One of the things that we at HSE, and here at the Coal Authority we can offer is being really part of that next wave of technology, safe Net Zero technologies and thinking about how we can all do our bit for climate change – and doing that in a safe way.”

Lisa Pinney said: “Public safety is the absolute ethos of both our organisations.”

Marking big anniversaries

Over the next 12 months, both HSE and the Coal Authority will mark significant milestones. It will soon be 50 years since HSE was formed on 1 January 1975, and 30 years since the Coal Authority was borne out of the Coal Board.

Sarah Albon said: “We’re enormously proud that generations of people working in HSE over the last 50 years have made huge strides in improving the safety of Britain’s workforce – we’re one of the safest countries to work in now.

“As we push forward into the next 50 years, we’re wanting to bring that same effort into health as we’ve done in safety. We’re still seeing people unnecessarily made ill through the work that they do.”

Lisa Pinney said: “It’s about celebrating our journey. We were created to support the coal industry when it was privatised, and to deal with some of the challenges around that. Over the last 30 years we’ve seen so much change, things like treating mine water, protecting drinking water and into the future thinking about opportunities like mine water heat.”

The pair were speaking on visit to the A-Winning mine water treatment site in Derbyshire, a scheme operated by the Coal Authority, of which Lisa Pinney is the chief executive.

Their full conversation has been converted into a 15-minute podcast which can be found here: <https://spotifyanchor-web.app.link/e/g7IUK9WaxHb>.

About HSE

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise.

www.hse.gov.uk

About the Coal Authority

The Coal Authority works to make a better future for people and the environment in mining areas. It manages Britain's coal mining legacy and, as a 24/7 emergency response organisation, responds to public safety and subsidence incidents caused by historical coal mining.

As part of the Coal Authority's work to enhance the environment, over 80 mine water treatment schemes are operated with the capacity to treat 220 billion of litres of water each year, helping to protect rivers and vital drinking water supplies.

The Coal Authority's work is helping to develop a new sustainable source of renewable energy for the UK. By harnessing the heat from the water within former mine workings, it hopes to play a key role in helping the UK to meet net zero targets by 2050.

Skills and information are also used to provide services to other government departments and agencies, local governments and commercial partners. By sharing knowledge and expertise, the Coal Authority supports the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments to create safer, cleaner and greener nations for all.

More information on the Coal Authority and its work can be found at:
www.gov.uk/coalauthority