Scottish Hazards

Scottish Hazards
18th Annual Conference Report
8 November 2018
Foreword

Our 18th Annual Scottish Hazards Conference brought together nearly 80 health and safety activists, including trade union health and safety representatives, TUC tutors, students and others with an interest in making Scottish workplaces safer, fairer and healthier for all.

The Conference came towards the end of a year where we are moving ever close to Brexit and the very real threat this poses to health and safety regulation and other laws designed to protect workers throughout the United Kingdom.

This year marked the 10th anniversary of the introduction of Corporate Manslaughter and Homicide laws, regulations the Hazards movement and many trade unions across the United Kingdom said would be totally ineffectual. Sadly, we have all been proved right, particularly in Scotland where not one company has been charged with the offence of Corporate Homicide let alone face prosecution. We welcome the proposals from Claire Baker MSP, launched at our conference, to reform our common law of Culpable Homicide to ensure it applies in all cases of involuntary deaths whether they happen in our communities or in our workplaces. The factory gates should not be a barrier to justice for the families impacted by the negligent or reckless actions of employers.

Shortly before our conference the Prime Minister assured us austerity had ended, a position not shared by her own Chancellor and most likely a view not shared by public sector workers who continue to suffer financially as a result of austerity or by those placed under such pressure by the impact of austerity their mental health has suffered.

This is the real impact of austerity, our workplaces are less healthy, workers are on wages that they struggle to live on causing stress at home as well as at work. Our health and safety enforcement has been slashed by the ideologically unsound Tory Government to such an extent that young people entering the workplace today will be unlikely to ever witness an enforcement visit by an HSE Inspector or a Local Authority Environmental Health Officer. Unless of course they, or a colleague are involved in, or witness a workplace incident resulting in a major injury or fatality.

Workplace Health and Safety is at a crossroads, we cannot continue to travel down a road that is ideologically driven by a Government focused on appeasing the demands of business,

Scottish Hazards are committed to working with trade unions and others to ensure this does not happen.

Scottish Hazards hope you find this report useful and hopefully encourages attendance at next year’s event. Meanwhile if you wish to contact us please feel free to drop us an e-mail at info@scottishhazards.org

Scott Donohoe
Chair, Scottish Hazards
Introduction
Introduction

The impact of austerity on workplace health and safety should never be underestimated, the Health and Safety Executive has suffered cuts of 45% in their budgets since austerity began and local authority enforcement has suffered even worse.

Workplaces previously enforced by the Local Authority Environmental Health Officers are to the greatest extent no longer enforced, hit by attacks on two fronts, first by cuts in budgets for environmental health departments and second by Government decree in Good Health and Safety is Good for Everyone that “low risk” workplace, the very workplaces EHO’s inspect should no longer be subject to proactive health and safety enforcement.

Our own research carried out during the year, Stress and Mental Health in Public Sector Workplaces would suggest otherwise, most of our public sector workplaces would be deemed low risk but cuts in jobs and increased workplace have seen stress levels rise and sickness absence costs rocket since austerity began. In our research we very conservatively estimate stress and mental ill health in our public sector to be at the very least £112m per year and rising, overall sickness absence amounted to £421m. For Scottish Hazards this is unsustainable, and the solution must be investing in fairer, healthier and safer workplaces, devolving health and safety legislation and creating a long-term strategy to deliver occupational health services through the NHS.

Enough is Enough – Health and Safety Cuts Cost Lives is the theme of this year’s conference and Scottish Hazards sees the denial of continuing austerity and our forthcoming exit from the European Union, from where most of our health and safety legislation and protection originates, as a defining moment in health and safety, particularly for Scottish Workers.

The failure of the Corporate Homicide Act 2007, brought in by the previous UK Labour Government has been a disaster, it neither punishes offenders nor acts as a deterrent, no charges in over 10 years despite over 150 work related deaths investigated by the HSE in that period bares testimony to this.

Cuts in health and safety must be reversed and commitments given by John McDonald at the UK Hazards Conference in 2017 are welcome, However, we want to ensure that responsibility for driving health and safety improvement, developing innovative approaches to regulation and enforcement and creating legislation that works and delivers justice lies with the Scottish Government of the day.

Much of our agenda would be so much easier to deliver if that was the case.
Culpable Homicide Scotland Bill

Scottish Hazards were delighted that Claire Bake MSP chose our Conference to launch her proposals for reform of culpable homicide legislation to ensure employers and individuals can be charged and prosecuted for culpable homicide following deaths at work.

Claire proposes a Bill to amend the law of culpable homicide to ensure that where loss of life is caused by the recklessness or gross negligence of individuals, companies or organisations that, where proved, the wrongdoer can be convicted of the offence that reflects the appropriate seriousness and moral opprobrium of what occurred.

Patrick McGuire, Thompsons Solicitors outlined why we need changes in the law of Culpable Homicide, effective laws have three important characteristics, they should punish and rehabilitate offenders and act as a deterrent to those who may consider breaking them. The existing laws of Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide do neither.

Apart from a few cases involving mainly smaller companies prosecuted in England and Wales for Corporate Manslaughter the existing Acts have been dismal in respect of all three characteristics.

Patrick identified the flaws in the existing legislation including the need to identify significant failings of senior management in any breach leading to the death before a company can be prosecuted. He added this was anachronistic and does not reflect the way companies operate. Health and safety decisions may well be taken by senior management at board level but more likely these decisions made by relatively senior managers outwith the boardroom. However, the law of Culpable Homicide and prosecution authorities does not recognise the seniority of the latter.

In larger companies it is still easy for senior management to distance themselves from health and safety decision making, delegating health and safety decisions to lower management and pleading ignorance when things go wrong.

Highlighting the devastation caused by work related death Claire baker MSP said that deaths at work do not appear to register in the national consciousness as other involuntary deaths but families affected by deaths at work deserve justice.
She said the time was right to act on workplace deaths and to recognise the efforts by campaigning groups such as Scottish Hazards and Families Against Corporate Killers by introducing legislation to ensure bereaved families get justice.

Claire hopes that her proposals will convince the Scottish Parliament and her fellow MSPs that they can introduce legislation to ensure employers who kill their workers can be held accountable for their negligent and reckless actions that lead to workplace deaths by being prosecuted through the Scottish criminal justice system.

Clair is wanting responses from trade unions, trade union branches, campaigning organisations and, most importantly from this who have been denied justice, families who have lost loved ones as a result of work-related fatal injuries.

The final speaker in the plenary session launching Claire Baker’s proposal was Louise Taggart, a member of Scottish Hazards Board and as a founder member of Families Against Corporate Killers.

Louise’s brother Michael Adamson was electrocuted at work in 2005 and Louise has campaigned since then to ensure those responsible work workplace deaths are held to account for their failures, errors and omissions that deny families the basic human right of a life with their loved one.

She spoke of her loss and that of many other families and how that sense of loss increases when they think of what their loved ones are missing, in Michael’s case the chance to marry his fiancé, to become a father or an uncle and to be there for family occasions.

These personal losses are compounded with a sense of anger in being denied justice where individuals who take decisions that result in loss of life still hide behind the corporate veil and evade prosecution for their failures. The existing law of Culpable Homicide and the totally ineffectual reserved offence of Corporate Homicide is not capable holding individual corporate killers to account.

Louise spoke of the real cost of health and safety failures and how we should not fall into the trap of focusing on HSE statistics, they are just the tip of the workplace fatality iceberg and do not include deaths investigated by other regulators the Air Accident Investigation Branch, the Marine Accident Investigation Branch and the Rail Accident Investigation Branch.

Thousands more workers across the United Kingdom each year die of work-related cancers, hundreds in road traffic accidents directly related to work and an unknown number take their own lives in work relate suicides all passing largely unnoticed unless brought to the attention of the public by campaigners such as FACK, the Hazards movement and trade unions.
Louise cautioned against the use of the word accident in relation to work reacted deaths, an accident is something not foreseeable, when employers fail in their health and safety responsibilities the tragic consequences are all too often foreseeable, therefore work-related deaths should not be classed as accidental.

**Health, Safety and Fair Work**

Patricia Findlay, Co-Chair of the Fair Work Convention spoke on the work of the Convention and the strong link between improving health and safety and delivering the Fair Work Agenda.

The Convention views health and safety as a core element in creating fairer work, work places different physical demands on all workers, particularly those with protected characteristics. There are greater workplace risks related to class and socio-economic status as well as many professional occupations placing hidden demands on those carrying out the work. All these physical demands, if not managed properly can have an increasing detrimental impact on the psychological health and well-being of the workforce.

Patricia spoke about increasing insecurity at work with workers concerned about insecure working hours likely to harbour other workplace insecurities such as risk of job loss, status downgrading and lack of employment protection leaving them open to unfair dismissal.

Work intensification also impacts on health and wellbeing with more and more workers reporting being physical exhausted after a day’s work, particularly in teaching and nursing where most of the workers are women. Recent figures have shown a sharp increase in women working in high demand roles with increasing work effort with little task discretion leading to an increased risk of work-related stress.

Job demands, lack of resources and lack of control over tasks are not only drivers of unhealthy stressful work but they are inextricably linked to health and well being of workers and delivering fulfilling work.

Patricia spoke of the decline in workplace collective voice mechanisms and how the effectiveness of individual voice is limited. In 2017 an increase in workers reporting having an influence over organisational decisions affecting their work was evident but it is still the case that less than one in three workers can influence organisational decision-making, meaning most Scottish workers are denied the health and well-being benefits associated with effective employee voice.

In conclusion Patricia spoke of the targets included in the National Performance Framework on work related ill health and collective bargaining coverage, the first time such measures had been included and how we can exert influence over reserved health and safety matters. The next steps for Fair Work will be the publication of the Fair Work Action Plan and an expectation that fair work will be mainstreamed across all areas of Scottish Government such as health, justice etc.
New Approaches to Health and Safety Regulation and Enforcement

Dave Moxham, STUC Deputy General Secretary and Ian Tasker from Scottish Hazards spoke of the need for a review of all regulation in Scotland that impacts on the workplace, the work environment and the health, safety and well-being of workers.

This should go beyond occupational health and safety and examine fire safety, building and fire regulations and include those who regulate the regulators, supposedly on quality of public services such as fire, police and care. Scottish Hazards believe they should have a role in reporting health safety and well-being concerns of those delivering services in addition to assessing quality and is concerned their measure of quality is often linked to matching service quality to funding levels.

Dave Moxham outlined work the STUC were undertaking with Scottish Hazards to try to get a clearer understanding of the regulatory map in Scotland and what could be done to ensure regulators are aware of what is happening in their areas of responsibility and the impact this is having on workers.

There are three key areas that need to be examined:

How can we involve grass roots membership in the regulatory debate, establish what the key health and safety issues are, are they localised either by geography or industrial sector or more widespread, as is likely to be the case with occupational stress? The network of health and safety reps throughout Scotland would be key to gathering this information and more importantly be a powerful voice in public debate and public policy decisions aimed at tackling these issues.

Both the STUC and Scottish Hazards, as well as several trade unions support devolution of health and safety legislation. The Scottish Government obviously shares this view although have never showed any signs of setting a vision for how workplace regulation in Scotland would look if powers were transferred to Holyrood. The Scottish Parliament and its Committees could investigate the regulatory map in Scotland to establish what is happening and what is required to create a fair, open and transparent workplace regulatory framework.

The political ideology of the current UK Government has decimated workplace regulation, particularly in the area of workplace health and safety, UK decisions based on the premise that regulation is bad and too burdensome now mean local authorities are not permitted to inspect the vast majority of workplace where they had done so previously. This race to bottom may well be accelerated as we leave the European Union and health and safety directives established over many years and, for the most part effective in their purpose, come under attack from deep seated, anti-worker, pro-business, right wing deregulators.

Ian Tasker expanded on the attacks by the Conservative Government on health and safety regulation pointing out that these attacks had been driven not by evidence but by ideology following several flawed “independent” reviews where recommendations they did not like or would not deliver their political agenda were ignored or twisted to meet their needs.

The health and safety system has been dismantled to such an extent that it will be hard to rebuild, experienced HSE Inspector’s and Environmental Health Officers have left the profession, the HSE publishes very little research anymore, the drive towards commercialisation of the HSE continues and continued interference by the UK Government in the work of the HSE is threatening the tripartism and autonomy of the body thought to be important by Robens over 40 years ago.
Scottish Hazards believes the time is right for us, trade unions and like-minded organisations to reclaim the health and safety system for the workers it was proposed to protect and not for the self-interests of employers who cry about over burdensome regulation without giving a thought to those who may be harmed by soft light touch self-regulation.

Scottish, UK and European Hazards Updates

Scottish Hazards

An update on Scottish Hazards work was provided by Ian Tasker, Scottish Hazards Project Worker, in a busy year work has been going on to establish working relationships with trade unions both large and small. We have spoken to Unite, GMB, RMT and the BFAWU. Scottish Hazards are looking to develop this work further in the coming year and to work with trade union branches to help them develop health and safety campaigns.

The number of cases is continually increasing, and the nature of the cases is varied as would be expected, what is clear from our casework is that there is a desperate need for advice centres such as ours for those in not trade unions, working for non-unionised employers and not aware of their rights. We continue to promote the benefits of trade union membership to workers to whom we provide advice or represent when the opportunity arises.

Scottish Hazards published four briefings and responded to three consultation and details on these and other areas of our work can be found in the annual report by clicking on the image to the right.

UK Hazards

Continuing attacks on our regulatory system including health and safety leave workers and communities more exposed to danger while decision makers are increasingly let off the hook by a Government more intent on dividing the country and communities than bringing them together. Hilda Palmer, UK Hazards & Greater Manchester Hazards Centre said this is how we need a strong Hazards movement as well as strong trade unions actively campaigning on health and safety issues.

The real cost of employer’s health and safety failures, deaths as a result of disease, suicide or road traffic fatalities connected to work remain a secret, the Government’s wishful thinking that they should remain hidden from the general public, something that will not happen if groups like Hazards, Families Against Corporate Killing and trade unions continue to be a thorn in the flesh of Governments intent on appeasing business demands for light touch regulation at the cost of human life and prevention from harm and injury in the workplace.
Hilda Palmer and Kathy Jenkins, Secretary of Scottish hazards paid tribute to Jim Swan, a founder of Scottish Hazards as well as a driving force behind UK Hazards and the development of the European Work Hazards Network.

Jim was a former convenor at British Leyland where he developed his lifelong interest in occupational health and safety including founding an RSI group in Scotland, helping develop the Lothian Trade Union Resource Centre and the Lothian Occupational Health Project in GP surgeries in the 1990’s. He was instrumental in bringing International Workers Memorial Day to Scotland and having it recognised by the STUC, the first trade union centre in the United Kingdom to do so. Jim’s work on International Worker’s Memorial Day has seen the STUC and local TUC’s campaign have the day more widely recognised and establish memorials throughout Scotland.

Unfortunately, Jim could not attend conference due to illness, but he was presented with a silver badge by UK Hazards and a commemorative plaque from Scottish Hazards in recognition of his service to the Hazards movement.

Secretary, Kathy Jenkins is pictured handing over the awards to Jim at his home shortly after the conference.

**European Works Hazards Network**

Seven delegates for Scotland attended the 15th European Works Hazards Conference in Copenhagen and Scottish Hazards was delighted to be able to fund places for two young workers from Better then Zero to travel to Denmark and contribute to the debate on precarious employment.

Not without some irony one of them Samantha Philips, a hospitality worker on a zero hours contract could not make it to our conference as she had been called into work. Matt spoke of his experiences of the conference, finding out more about working practices in other countries and having the opportunity to promote Better than Zero to trade union members and health and safety activists from across Europe.

Lauren Vogel from the ETUI spoke on the clear link between centre/far right Governments and attacks on health and safety and employment regulation where poor work replaces collectivism and workers suffer as a result, he finished his contribution with an impassioned plea for all delegates to remember, and one particularly apt for health and safety, “an injury to one is an injury to all”.

For more information on the conference click the EWHN logo.
John Brown from the GMB at BAE System Marine Surface Ships spoke on a campaign his branch is developing on welding fume and the need to ensure workers undertaking welding activity as part of their work are properly protected from welding fume and its consequences.

The occupational health impact of welding fume and other gases created in the welding process have long been understood although employers have been slower in ensuring workers have adequate exhaust ventilators and access to health screening to protect against developing occupational diseases such as cancers, asthma and other welding related illnesses.

John also highlighted research from the United States showing increased incidences of symptoms of Parkinson’s disease in a cohort of welders, information that is not widely known about or recognised in the United Kingdom.

Welders at Govan have access to the best available protection, identified and sourced by trade union reps and purchased by the employers. They also have access to occupational health screening, but the branch aims to ensure that everyone has access to preventative measures not just welders, but anyone working in or around enclosed spaces when welding activity is being carried out.

They want to take the welding fume campaign outside the shipyard to ensure employers of welders are aware of their responsibilities to protect workers from disease and workers are aware of the dangers as well as the symptoms of welding related diseases and ill health conditions.

John is hopeful of a conference being arranged for later in 2019 bringing together trade unions, employers, asbestos charities and occupational disease specialists to develop the campaign further.

Unite 3 & 3 Campaign

David Mackenzie, a Unite member working on a Wood Group contract for Shell spoke about Unite’s 3 and 3 campaign to restore the two weeks on three weeks off rota as the industry standard on offshore oil platforms in the North Sea.

Changes to working patterns had been introduced without consultation and quickly spread across the industry without any consideration on the impact this would have on the health safety and
welfare of the workers forced to work these new arrangements or the potential harm it could have on their family life and relationships. In an industry with an already high divorce rate among workers these new arrangements would be likely to cause excessive stress on the home life of workers and their families.

Offshore work can be extremely strenuous with constant 12-hour shifts taking toil on a two-week offshore trip let alone a three-week trip consisting of 21 nights, offshore workers can never escape the industrial environment in which they work and live, sleep is disturbed due to constant noise and this often carries through into the first few days of their time at home.

Sensing the dangers to their members, Unite Offshore Branch launched a campaign to restore 3 and 3 working and David reported that Shell had agreed to do so following consultation with its workforce including Unite representatives.

The challenge now is to pressure other operators such as BP and Petrofac to do the same and not only to make the North Sea a safer, healthier pace to work but to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of their workers and families does not suffer as a result of the work they do.

**Trade Union Friends of Bhopal**

Kathy Jenkins updated conference on Trade Union Friends of Bhopal, explaining Trade Union Friends of Bhopal aims to build a network of unions and union members, starting here in the UK, but aiming to spread worldwide, to support the people of Bhopal. Given the occupational safety issues leading up to the disaster in Bhopal, trades unions would seem like a natural place for support of the Bhopal campaign to flourish.

TUFB will campaign for justice for the people of Bhopal and, drawing inspiration from their long struggle, support campaigns for all victims of corporate crime. TUFB will also campaign for prevention of similar tragedies through stronger global regulation on health, safety and environmental protection. Regulation which puts regard for human life and the environment at the centre, and ahead of profit, is crucial.

Kathy pointed out that the 3 November 2019 will be the 35th anniversary of the disaster and thousands of people in Bhopal continue to suffer from illness and disease as a result of Union Carbide’s negligence and Dow Chemical’s failure to accept liability for the horror inflicted on the people of Bhopal.
Workshops

Toxic Use Reduction

This workshop session was facilitated by Professor Andrew Watterson from Stirling University and examined the use of toxins in the workplace and how we develop toxic use reduction as the main strategy for preventing workers from exposure to harmful substances in their workplaces.

Most of the delegates attending this workshop provided experiences of working with substances likely to cause them harm including asbestos, dust, household waste, cleaning materials, welding fume and chrome rubber a substance used in manufacture of synthetic playing fields.

Andy spoke of work being undertaken in other countries to reduce the use of toxic substances, most notably in Massachusetts where the following targets were site in 1989:

- Achieve 50% reduction in byproduct (waste) by 1998
- Establish toxics use reduction as the preferred means of compliance
- Promote the competitive advantage of Massachusetts Industry
- Reduce the production and use of toxic chemicals

These were the first targets of their kind in the United States and designed to have economic and environmental benefits for all, for businesses/employers, for workers and for wider communities. The result in Table 1 show what has been achieved up to 2005

Trade union organisation is vitally important in tackling toxic use reduction in workplaces, established collective bargaining arrangements including recognised trade union health and safety/environmental representatives provide the foundation for effective toxic use reduction in the workplace.

There is some evidence of work being done in Europe to protect workers from toxins but not at the same pace for other areas of consumer protections and unions really need to look at the United States where reduction projects are based on problem solving rather than problem shifting, the latter is of real concern as putting in place control measures to protect workers may well create risk elsewhere out in the community.

Andy concluded saying we need a new way of working to tackle exposure to toxins, assessment of level of risk of exposure should be secondary to the hazards created by use of the substance and its elimination, the precautionary principle should apply where knowledge gaps on the chemical and its dangers are enough to stop or prevent its use.

Massachusetts Toxic Use Reduction Act 1989

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Table 1
[Click for presentation]
One of the emerging thoughts coming out of the workshop was the need for a multidisciplinary approach to this work involving trade unions, Scottish Hazards, chemists, engineers, workers, designers and others with a desire to make Scotland a fairer, healthier and environmentally safer and healthier place to live and work.

The question would be whether Scotland could develop a model like the one that had delivered significant change in Massachusetts.

**Breathe Freely**

John Brown from the GMB spoke about his branches work in raising awareness of welding fume and its dangers to workers health, particularly in relation to occupational long disease and cancers.

In his workplace, BAE Systems in Govan, the issue has been addressed through the existing industrial relations machinery in the ship yard John but his branch are keen to raise awareness of the issue and the risks in workplaces and communities throughout Scotland with a clear message that this should not develop into another asbestos where the risk are known but hidden from those most at risk, in this case welders, their colleagues and their families.

Everyone who carries out welding as part of their job is potentially at risk of exposure to the harmful effects of welding fume. The impact that exposure is likely to have will depend on the amount of time spent on welding activity, some occupations such as shipbuilding and fabrication (e.g. emerging offshore and onshore windfarms) where the welder is involved in assembling pre-cut steel and components will involve far greater exposure to welding fume than workers who carry out preparation work on jobs in addition to welding and therefore less of their working day is spent on welding activity.

The GMB branch, Unite and Scottish Hazards have developed a briefing on welding fume and its health risks designed to raise awareness of issue and to encourage employers to take adequate preventative measures to ensure their employees are free from occupational lung disease associated with welding activity.

It is estimated that around 190000 individuals, employed and self-employed, carry out welding activity in the course of their work, it is also estimated that around 150 workers each year die as a result of exposure to welding fume.

The development of Breathe Freely in Manufacturing by the BOHS, supported by employers - including BAE Systems - as well as trade unions, is a significant step forward. The Breathe Freely initiative provides employers and trade unions with the resources and opportunity to develop innovative approaches to making welding work fairer, healthier and safer for all. Such an approach would fit with the Scottish Government’s vision of having a successful economy by 2025 with fair work as its foundation.
Discussions in the workshop broadened out to include delegates experiences in their own workplaces of occupational lung disease and steps being taken to prevent exposure to respiratory disease within the workplace.

Me Too in the Workplace

Gillian Merchant from Thompsons Solicitors ran the workshop on sexual harassment and harassment related to sex and how the abuse of power present in cases of harassment is the same abuse of power witnessed in more general workplace bullying and harassment cases that reps deal with in the workplace only in this case the abuse is based on the sex of the victim.

The impact on sexual harassment on victims is most certainly a health and safety issue and the principles of prevention should apply in cases in the same way as other workplace hazards.

Gillian stressed the importance of reps ensuring policies and procedures are negotiated, arrangements in place for their effectiveness to be monitored, they are adequately trained to represent members suffering sexual harassment and where to go for further advice.

Reps should also advise members of the importance of evidence and the process of making a complaint including:

- Record keeping, what happened, when, how and by whom
- Keep a copy of any documentation, e-mails including any written complaint made
- Identify witnesses
- Keep record of any medical evidence or appointments in connection with the harassment.

Gillian reminded delegates of the three-month limitation from the date of the incident and that claims can be brought against the employer (vicarious liability) and the individual and that remedies include an acknowledgement that the act of harassment took place, compensation for the injury to feeling and recommendation to ensure the person harassed, or measure to ensure colleagues are prevented from treatment of a similar nature in the future.

Health, Safety and Freedom of Information

Scottish Hazards published a report on stress and mental ill-health in public sector workplaces to coincide with the conference and Ian Tasker talked through the Freedom of Information Act 2002 and how it could be used to gather evidence for unions to use in workplace health and safety campaigns.

The purpose of Scottish Hazards FOI requests had been to try and make some correlation between stress and mental ill health prior to the economic crash and the last full financial year and to what extent
job losses imposed under the guise and stealth of austerity had impacted on workloads and workplace mental health.

The first step to using FOI is to create a database of relevant organisations from whom you wish to request information.

It was stressed that framing the questions was important, as was identifying the organisations from whom you wished to gather information, how the information was going to be used and what improvements you would envisage being made or, perhaps more precisely, having to be fought for from the information received.

Any organisations using FOI laws should track all aspects of the process from requests, acknowledgments, through to responses and how far you are willing to go in order to extract information from those who do not respond within the 20-working day period allowed.

Scottish Hazards has submitted FOI requests had been submitted to 159 organisations across local government, health services, further and higher education, emergency services and non-departmental public bodies.

Of the 159 requests submitted, 96 provided full or partial responses, 63 provided costs for overall sickness absence of £421m for 2017/18, only 44 could break down costs relating to mental ill health. This amounted to £112.5m for 2017/18.

Scottish Hazards intended the information to be used by public sector trade unions to help inform their work on workplace stress and mental ill health as well as being used to highlight the massive amount of public money being wasted on sickness absence costs on a work-related health problem that could and should be managed more effectively.

The recommendations called for an economic study of occupational ill health in Scotland, to shift the focus from punitive and reactive employers responses to work related ill health to supportive and proactive interventions, a long term strategy to develop occupational health services based on Nordic models, all public sector employers to implement the HSE Stress Management Standards in full and to have a common ill health reporting model across all our public sector.

The figures gathered by Scottish Hazards are an indication of the burden placed on Scottish taxpayers to meet the costs of ill health in our public sector.

It was pointed out the real cost is likely to be far higher than we have been able to estimate as some organisations failed to respond at all and a large number did not hold information on sickness absence costs in any form, either for overall sickness absence or for absences related to stress and mental ill health.

It was stressed that for Scottish Hazards this had been a learning process, in future a smaller number of organisations may be targeted allowing for more time to be spent chasing those who do not respond.
Support Scottish Hazards

The Scottish Hazards Centre provides advice, training & support to workers and their reps on workplace health & safety issues. We aim to reduce work-related injury, ill health & death through increasing knowledge and awareness, improving practice & developing effective worker involvement. We need to secure annual funding of £100,000. A key message will be that union workplaces are safer workplaces! Your support in the form of an affiliation would be hugely appreciated.

Individual donations

100 individual donations if £5 per month will buy 1 day of advice per week, donations from individuals are greatly appreciated and help us to support and represent workers disenfranchised for trade union members and the health and safety protection that brings.

Trade Union Branches

Scottish Hazards acknowledges the support we receive from trade unions and their members and we would like to support trade unions branch health and safety campaigns in return for donations, for further information on what we can do for your branch please contact Ian Tasker, ian@scottishhazards.org.

Trade Unions

Scottish Hazards is proud of our association with Scotland’s trade unions and grateful for the financial support we receive from some unions. Individual members and branches have an important role to play helping us to secure donations from unions, please contact your union asking them to consider donating to Scottish Hazards.

Sponsored Events

Considering running a marathon, triathlon or similar event please consider raising money for Scottish Hazards.

International Workers Memorial Day

Joint trade unions at Babcock Marine in Rosyth and at BAE Systems purchase IWMD purple ribbons and cars stickers and exchange them for donations to Scottish Hazards in the run up to the 28th April, to find out how you could do similar contact ian@scottishhazards.org

For more information on how to donate please visit our website
https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/3509#/DonationDetails