



# ORR occupational health programme update

April 2016

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## Introduction

This quarterly brief updates you on progress with some of the work under [ORR's Occupational Health programme 2014-19](#), to inform discussions on health with ORR inspectors. We have identified key messages for rail duty holders and would welcome [feedback](#).

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## This issue focuses on:

- The use of solvents in the workplace
- No Time To Lose on silica: are rail companies meeting the challenge
- Occupational health five year plans

## 1. How much do you know about solvents?

A recent case has highlighted the need to be alert to the effects of solvents on our health and for managers and supervisors to be aware that, while we still need to use solvents in our work, they should be used appropriately and treated with respect, ensuring they are used in a ventilated environment and that the correct Respiratory Protective Equipment is supplied.

In December 2015 at Dundee Sheriff Court, a company was fined £300k (reduced to £200k in recognition of their guilty plea) for a breach of section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 which resulted in the death of one of their employees.

In January 2010, the deceased was undertaking grit blasting and spray painting within Pier Leg 44 of the Tay Rail Bridge. But regrettably, the confined space where he was working was inadequately ventilated and he had not been provided with full breathing apparatus for

the spray painting operations and consequentially was overcome by Toluene fumes from the paint and died at the scene.

The contractor had not identified the pier leg as a confined space while the spray painting was being carried out; there were no methods of monitoring of oxygen levels in the work area, inadequate supervision and lack of rescue facilities in the event of an accident.

This is a timely reminder of the importance of properly planned work, ensuring adequate ventilation and the use of suitable Respiratory Protective Equipment.

HSE have two useful leaflets entitled "[Working with solvents](#)" and "[Confined Spaces – A brief guide to working safely](#)" as well as their web pages on [spraying](#) and [Construction hazardous substances: Solvents](#).

## Key messages:

- Are you aware which hazardous substances / solvents are used at your worksite?
- What constitutes a confined space? Are there any areas of your worksite that could be a confined space?
- If you use Respiratory Protective Equipment at your worksite, is it regularly checked for wear and tear? Are your workers trained in how to fit and use it? Is it suitable for the solvents being used, are the correct filters fitted?

## 2. No Time To Lose on silica: are rail companies meeting the challenge?

The recent launch of [IOSH's No Time To Lose silica dust campaign](#) may prompt rail companies to take a critical look at whether they are doing enough to manage exposures to silica, the second biggest cause of occupational cancers in Britain, resulting in nearly 800 deaths each year. As well as the risk of lung cancer, silica dust can also cause silicosis and other serious respiratory diseases if not properly controlled.

Although the potential for exposure to silica in rail ballast handling and track renewals is now well recognised, awareness of risks from silica in other parts of our industry is much lower. Rail workers can be exposed to respirable crystalline silica (RCS) during maintenance work on track, for example when cutting concrete troughing or paving, but also at stations, depots and other buildings where refurbishment may be under way. Tasks involving cutting, chasing, drilling, grinding and any resultant dry sweeping of concrete, stone, aggregate, brick, tiles, or cement/mortar could potentially expose rail workers to high silica dust levels, well over the Workplace Exposure Limit of  $0.1\text{mg/m}^3$ . The controls needed for these common construction-type tasks are well established, including use of on-tool extraction for portable equipment; water sprays to suppress the dust; suitable

vacuum cleaners (M type as minimum) rather than dry sweeping; and suitable FFP3 standard respiratory protective equipment (RPE) only as a last resort.

If your workers don't fully understand the risks from exposure to silica dust, they are less likely to use the controls properly and report any faults, so training is absolutely key. Our inspection work shows improving awareness of risks from silica in track renewals, but we believe that it remains low in other parts of the industry.

## Key Messages:

- Have you assessed exposures to silica dust in routine maintenance tasks, including on railway buildings, as part of your COSHH assessment? Are you aware of the control measures needed, beyond putting workers in RPE? HSE has produced helpful guidance on the risks and controls for a range of [common construction type tasks](#) which will be equally relevant to the rail industry.
- Now is the time to take action on silica to ensure that your workers are protected and you are complying with the law. Many rail infrastructure companies and contractors have already [pledged their support](#) to the 'IOSH No Time To Lose' (NTTL) campaign. We want to see more rail companies make this public commitment to do more to tackle occupational cancers – with silica second only to asbestos in causing work related cancers, now is the time for the rail industry to show real leadership. Will your company commit to tackle occupational cancers?
- Do your workers appreciate the risks from exposure to concrete, stone, cement and brick dust? Do they understand that fine dust particles that can reach deep into their lungs are invisible under normal lighting? The [free NTTL silica campaign resources](#), including posters, leaflet, pocket cards and tool box talks, could be a powerful tool for communicating these messages. Mainline workers should start to see Network Rail branded version of the IOSH silica resources as part of their commitment to the NTTL campaign. IOSH is also hosting silica campaign awareness events around the UK through this spring and summer.

## 3. Occupational health five year plans – we've got one, have you?

In December, HSE announced their [five year health and safety strategy](#) that will run from 2016 to 2020, covering six themes. This plan is reflective of ORR's own five year [occupational health strategy](#) which began in 2014 and RSSB's "[Leading Health and Safety on Britain's Railway](#)".

There are common themes running through all of these strategies; engagement, costs, excellent health risk management, ownership / enabling, efficiency and the benefits of promoting better occupational health.

ORR's vision is of a rail industry that consistently achieves best practice in occupational health, as it has done in safety risk management. In order for ORR to assist the industry in achieving this, we have been re-working our work-bank of activities in the light of emerging findings from the '[Better Health is Happening](#)' review which was published in June 2015. This will enable us to target key areas where the review highlighted the need for further industry action.

### **So where is ORR in its five year plan and what is planned for the next three years?**

We are working with the Ballast Dust Working Group, IOSH Rail Group, RMT and RSSB on our policy position regarding worker safety and respirable crystalline silica.

We are liaising with HSE on research into the health risks associated with exposure to diesel engine emissions and whether this will require a change to current legislation and ORR's policy on compliance with COSHH.

We are reviewing the adequacy of HAVS health surveillance.

We are engaging with principle contractors and labour suppliers to explore the potential inclusion of wider HAVS monitoring data.

ORR and RSSB have been collaborating with the industry to pursue the [Health and Wellbeing Road Map](#). ORR and RSSB have been attending each other's occupational health working groups.

Following a successful 3 day, level 3 Health Risk Management for Rail Sector Managers / Supervisors pilot course run by CITB and hosted by First Transpennine Express, we are running a further course in May 2016 and are grateful to Merseyrail for hosting it on this occasion.

Working together, we can achieve excellence in occupational health in the rail industry.

## **Key messages:**

- Does your health policy set out your organisation's commitment to ensure people are not exposed to undue health risks? Does your policy cover contractors?
- Do you have a health strategy and action plan that protects your organisation as well as individual's health?
- Do you have reports of employees experiencing back problems, respiratory illness, noise induced hearing loss etc. that could point towards a particular risk that you should prioritise such as construction dust and fumes, musculoskeletal or manual

handling? How is this data managed and do you take action on it? Does it include contractors?

- Do you have health surveillance and fitness for work medicals in place for conditions such as those mentioned above?
- Have you signed up to the [Public Health Responsibility Deal](#), and [IOSH No Time To Lose](#) pledge.



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