

Putting an end to 'conkers bonkers'

We've all seen the stories about hanging baskets being banned, kids being made to wear goggles to play conkers and dozens of other over-the-top decisions that are pinned on 'elf 'n' safety'. IOSH has decided it's time to make a stand for sensible health and safety.

This month, we've been sponsoring the World Conker Championships in Northamptonshire. Our presidential team is taking part – and there isn't a pair of safety goggles in sight! We want to show that it's possible to be safe and have fun without silly rules.

We've also been keeping a close eye on health and safety stories in the media. Each time we spot an example of health and safety presented in a daft or distorted way, we're giving it a 'Bonkers Conker' stamp. When we see a story that presents health and safety in a balanced and sensible way, it gets a 'Bonzer Conker' stamp. In December, we'll tot up the bonkers and bonzer stamps and give awards to the media outlets with the most of each.

All this publicity means that when there's a silly story, we get the chance to put a balanced viewpoint across – we've had coverage on national and local TV and radio, as well as in the press. The light-hearted coverage lets us make serious points, too – for example we're highlighting the risks young workers are facing in their first jobs or work experience placements.



We're also looking to link up with the HSE's Sensible Risk

Assessment Unit to fight the 'conkers bonkers' syndrome. We're supported in this by the new Key Stage 3 guidelines from the government – these have more emphasis on risk issues, and aim to raise the profile of health and safety in education.

• Find out more about our campaign by clicking on www.iosh.co.uk/conkers.

David Chitty

We're sorry to report that our chairman, David Chitty, has had to retire from the committee because of ill health. David has been a great champion for health and safety in education and has supported the sector within IOSH and in other organisations. He's given this group tireless and dedicated service in his role as chair and we'll miss his humour and enthusiasm. We thank you, David, most sincerely and wish you a speedy recovery.

Health and safety's fun for kids

Is health and safety a subject just for adults? Stuart Wood and Kevin Williamson of Cambridgeshire County Council's Health and Safety Advisory Group don't think so, and they pioneered a successful new competition for the county's schoolchildren.

When last year's European Safety Week topic – young people at work – was announced, it seemed too good an opportunity to miss, so, armed with our enthusiasm (and our budget holder's permission and credit card!), we decided to visit the Safety and Health Expo at the NEC to find attention-grabbing ways of introducing good health, safety and welfare messages into schools.

During our trawl of the stands we came across a game called TC Kids, which is aimed at Key Stage 2 children (7–11 year olds). It took us about 30 seconds to decide we'd put it to the test with some 'guinea pig' children.

We piloted the game at a school that was already active in raising pupils' awareness of building site hazards. This was successful, so we arranged a contest involving schools across Cambridgeshire. After an advertising campaign using emails, flyers and the county council's schools web portal, we ran individual heats at local schools during September. These culminated in a grand final in October between the four highest-scoring teams.

The final was fought out between teams from Middlefield Primary School in St Neots, Steeple Morden Primary School and two teams from Castle Camps Primary School. The winning team (the aptly named 'Champions' from Middlefield) received a trophy

continued on back page...

Stress – a personal coping strategy

Maggie Atterbury offers some tips on dealing with those moments when everything threatens to get on top of you.

We hear a lot about the effects of stress on teaching staff in schools – and, indeed, it's a very real problem. But we never hear about stress among safety advisers who work in the education sector. But I'm aware of at least four advisers whose health has suffered severely from stress, and two of these have eventually had to take early retirement. Of course, we all know that it's the employer's responsibility to assess and reduce the risk from stress to employees, but here are some suggested strategies that we as individuals can use to help us cope.

Something's got to give

If I'm overloaded and have yet another task allocated to me, I don't refuse to carry it out, but I do explain that if I take on this one, something else will have to be dropped or postponed. I ask my manager to identify which takes priority. This helps make sure that I'm not overwhelmed with tasks which won't fit into my normal working day. It's about learning to say no nicely!

Stick to your standards

I realised long ago that the only person whose good opinion I need is me. Provided I've carried out my work to the best of my ability and the highest

professional standards, it's less important if others don't like the results or find the advice inconvenient. What they do with that advice is, obviously, up to them – you can't force anyone to accept advice, but we're all responsible individually for our own actions or inaction. Of course, I do try to help teaching staff achieve their aims, but my advice will be based on an assessment of the risks involved in the task, or with a particular group or student, not on inflexible rules. I also always remember the 'acid test' given to me many years ago by an experienced safety adviser, which was: "Only give advice that you would be prepared to stand in front of the coroner and justify."

Keep it in perspective

Finally, I worry about only those things that I have some control over. If I have no control, I can't affect the outcome, and by worrying I'm just expending energy and time ineffectually, achieving nothing but raised blood pressure! I try to deal with situations decisively as they come up, rather than speculate fruitlessly on the unknown.

Deliberately using these three strategies helps me to stay relatively calm and stress free. If you've got other suggestions, let us know!

Staying safe – consultation

The Department for Children, Schools and Families has issued a consultation document, *Staying safe*, which explores ways of:

- raising awareness of the importance of keeping children safe and of the main issues involved
- changing behaviour
- making sure the government's initiatives to safeguard children are coherent and co-ordinated
- reinforcing existing behaviour to plug gaps and improve links

- striking a balance between keeping children safe and allowing them to grow, explore and enjoy their childhood.

IOSH is producing a co-ordinated response to the consultation. If you'd like to contribute to this, please send your views to Murray Clark in the Technical Affairs team by 25 October.

- For more information, visit www.iosh.co.uk/ /condocs and follow the 'live documents' link, or email murray.clark@iosh.co.uk.

Be prepared for flu

All the experts agree that it's a matter of when, not if, a flu pandemic will hit. The Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health have produced a three-stage action plan for local authority children's services to help deal with the disruption. We've summarised the main stages below.

Stage 1 – Preparation

- review and update the Children's Services Business Continuity Plan to include maintaining statutory services with reduced numbers of staff
- make sure contact lists are up to date and check them every three months
- liaise with independent schools and neighbouring local authorities
- review cleaning and catering procedures to reduce the spread of infection as much as possible
- prepare practical guidance for schools to cover hygiene and staffing issues
- agree who will talk to the media in an emergency
- prepare information to support schools if remote education is needed, especially for exam year classes
- prepare educational psychologists to give support in case of deaths
- plan for increase in requirement for fostering.

Stage 2 – When there's an outbreak

- review the plan
- check that the contact lists are still up to date and maintain the reporting system
- encourage staff to stay at home if they feel ill and to keep their own children at home if they're ill
- pass on government instructions on school closures.

Stage 3 – After the event

When the first wave of the pandemic has passed, review crisis management policies and change plans as necessary before the next wave comes.

- Visit www.teachernet.gov.uk/emergencies/planning/flu/pandemic for the government's full guidance and many tools to help schools cope with a pandemic.

Keeping legionella at bay

Legionella can be a problem anywhere that warm water is left to stand – and schools are no exception. Elaine Pritchard from Halton Borough Council looks at the risk factors and how to overcome them.

As most health and safety professionals will know, legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia that can affect anybody, although it's more often confined to people who are susceptible because of illness, weakened immune systems, smoking and so on. There are other less harmful illnesses caused by legionella bacteria – the collective name given to this group of diseases is legionellosis. So far, there've been no reports of anyone aged under 24 dying from legionella-related illnesses, but we still have a duty to protect employees and visitors to our schools and colleges. So what is 'reasonable' action for schools to take?

Is your workplace at risk?

There's a risk of legionellosis infection if the following four factors are present:

- 1 legionella bacteria within the water system. As the bacteria occur naturally in small numbers in environmental water, including reservoirs, it's possible that they may be present in both hot and cold water supplies, lying dormant until conditions change to help them breed
- 2 water temperatures between 20°C and 45°C and a source of nutrients for the bacteria, including algae, rust, sludge or biofilm. The optimum temperature for proliferation is 37°C
- 3 processes or equipment that create and distribute breathable droplets, such as showers, hydrotherapy pools or water-cooled air conditioning systems
- 4 people who are vulnerable to infection.

The Approved Code of Practice on legionella infection (L8) requires employers or people in control of premises to carry out risk assessments in all workplaces to determine whether there's a significant risk of legionellosis and to record the findings. Depending on the status of the school, this

responsibility would therefore fall either to the local authority (LA) or to the governing body. All LAs need to be satisfied that school premises under their control have had a water hygiene risk assessment carried out by a competent specialist to determine whether there's a risk of legionellosis. Where the governing body is the employer, the LA still needs to make the governors aware of their responsibilities – best practice is to recommend competent specialists in water hygiene.

What you can do

Assessments for primary schools without showers are likely to show a low risk, since there's no way of producing breathable droplets. In these cases, it may be enough to regularly run taps that aren't used very often (such as in disabled toilets). But for special and secondary schools with showers and hydrotherapy pools, the risk increases substantially, particularly where the showers are tank-fed. Pupils with complex physical needs including respiratory disorders may be more susceptible to infection, so special schools catering for children with this kind of disability may need to take specialist advice on preventing legionella growth.

The recommended control measures are likely to include regular chlorination of water systems and frequent temperature testing at key outlets. As monthly temperature testing by a specialist contractor can be costly, some schools may opt to have their maintenance staff trained to do this. The person responsible for testing the temperatures must understand 'critical' temperatures – in other words, those that give cause for concern – and there must be a robust strategy for ensuring a rapid response. It's also essential that the person responsible feels confident and competent in their knowledge. Generic training on legionellosis isn't enough – they need site-specific

training. This training should be based around the control measures identified in the risk assessment for a particular water system and should again be provided by a competent person, possibly the specialist who carried out the risk assessment.

Getting the right advice

Where a significant risk is identified, under L8 a duty holder must be appointed to be responsible for the premises. This could be an officer in the LA, for example in estates or property management, the head teacher or the chair of governors. Whoever is chosen, they must be clear about their responsibilities, have access to expertise and make sure that any control measures required by the risk assessment are carried out by a trained, competent person.

If you take on a water hygiene consultant, make sure you check their competence. It's a good idea to use a contractor who's registered with the Legionella Control Association, which requires all its service providers to abide by its code of conduct.

To sum up, all schools need to have a clear strategy that covers assessing the risks of legionellosis and dealing with them as necessary. These functions should be carried out by competent specialists, and any local staff who have legionella responsibilities must have suitable training.

- *The control of legionella bacteria in water systems – Approved Code of Practice and guidance (L8)* is available from www.hsebooks.com.

Date for your diary

Our next networking event will be on 24 October at Wellington College in Berkshire, with the theme 'Building for safety'. There'll be presentations on CDM and the Regulatory Reform Order with an educational slant.

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In brief

Networking success

The recent seminar at Millfield School in Street, Somerset, was a great success – almost 70 members came and developed a number of networking opportunities. In particular, IOSH and the Independent Schools' Bursars Association are looking to forge closer links.

Fire safety

The Regulatory Reform Order is obviously directly relevant to health and safety and to schools. We're investigating the possibility of establishing a working party to develop nationally recognised and accredited procedures for compliance – this will help schools and colleges to follow good practice.

SG review

IOSH is reviewing the funding and management of the SG network to make sure that resources are being effectively matched to targets and results. We're continuing to strive to make the most efficient use of our resources on your behalf.

Triple whammy for WHAC!

Our Putting Young Workers First campaign has been going from strength to strength.

Last year, our website for young people, *Wiseup2work*, netted a Good Practice Award from the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work.

We followed this with the launch of WHAC, the Workplace Hazard Awareness Course for Year 10 students, which has already attracted 500 schools and colleges. We've awarded the IOSH Health and Safety Champions Award to Pete Glasswell, who helped develop the final version.

The Putting Young People First campaign has also been shortlisted by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations for its New PRide Award in the not-for-profit category in the Midlands.

Health and safety is an art

At the end of the year, everyone at art college wants to show off their creative work. This ranges from 3D projects – including ceramics, glass, jewellery and heavy metals – to fine art, photography, textiles, fashion and film. The Plymouth College of Art and Design's Summer Show presents many health and safety challenges, so we issued a checklist to teaching and technical staff to warn them about the main pitfalls:

- working from height – an HSE hot topic (who's never been tempted to grab the nearest chair or stool to climb on?)
- protecting the public – subtle but effective safety signage, adequate lighting, no trailing leads, dealing with spills, controlling visitor numbers
- electrical equipment – PAT checks, projector beams
- manual handling – heavy, metal installations, and all those unwieldy boards that never fit in the lift and are needed on the top floor, of course!
- escape routes – including good housekeeping standards, regular waste disposal and other fire arrangements

- hazardous substances – we had the chemical hazards under control and dealt with the unapproved solvents and glues that appeared on the premises, but didn't expect a biohazard. This took the form of a bacterial culture nicely incubating in a light box!
 - noise – whether from machinery or a media presentation
 - security arrangements – dealing with thefts, covering all times and areas.
- Thanks to everyone's hard work and common sense, the exhibition went well and a good – and safe – time was had by all.

Cynthia Palmer



The exhibition at Plymouth College of Art and Design

Health and safety's fun...

continued from front page...

and all the finalists were given a medal. The prizes were presented by Councillor Shona Johnstone, the county council's cabinet member for children and young people's services.

The final was held in front of an audience of parents, teachers and county council staff. They were all impressed by the health, safety and welfare knowledge the children had picked up during the heats.

This is the first year we've run the competition, and it's been so successful that we're hoping to make it an annual event. We hope, too, that it'll inspire

other education authorities in East Anglia and beyond to try something similar – we could even look towards an inter-county final in the future.

- Find out more about TC Kids at www.tckids.com.

Contact us

Link up with the newsletter co-ordinator, Joanne Lewis, consultant at A&L Facilities, at alfacilities@btinternet.com, or email petrina.beck@iosh.co.uk.