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Welcome to the latest issue of *Connect*

Hello and welcome to Connect.

Channel 4's recent documentary *The Fun Police* sparked a lot of comment, both from members and journalists. Despite the 'ribbing' the profession received at the hands of the programme-makers, many columnists chose to review the film positively.

One journalist from *The Sunday Times* wrote that there are far more deserving candidates for TV's ridicule than those who try and prevent workplace deaths and injuries. Describing the programme-makers as exploiting "a great big open goal", the article condemned those who wave accusing fingers and "guffaw at health and safety workers".

The film received a fair amount of cynicism from IOSH members, with one saying it was "about the best programme we could get in today's climate". Others felt it was "entirely as expected" and "just perpetuated the myth that safety officers are dull bureaucrats". You can read more feedback on the programme in this month's [Quote Me](#).

Also featured in this issue is [Marianne McDougall](#) from the UK's Houses of Parliament. Marianne tells us what it's like working in one of the most famous buildings in the world.

With Christmas round the corner, we talk to [Abby Miller](#) from the Home Retail Group about her work to make sure presents are delivered on time and in the safest way possible.

As well as industry news, we've the latest on IOSH 09 and how you can save money by booking now.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Connect. If you have any comments, or want to be featured in one of our articles, [please drop me a line](#).

Shaun Gibbons
e-Editor, IOSH

Spotlight: Elves 'n' safety

If, like most of us, you're leaving your Christmas shopping until the last minute (even though you promised yourself you wouldn't after last year) then spare a thought for the army of 'Santa's little helpers' whose job it is to keep the shops fully stocked in what's one of the peak times of the year for accidents in the retail sector.

Ask Abby Miller, Health and Safety Manager for the Home Retail Group, which includes Argos and Homebase, what's at the top of her Christmas list and she'll no doubt tell you: "fewer accidents."

"In the past few years, we've employed temporary workers from eastern Europe over the Christmas period to help with the increased workload," explains Abby. "Now though, we've seen them return home because of the difficult financial climate here in the UK, and that has meant using agency workers from this country.

"Because there's been a shift in terms of workforce - the old one moves out and a new one moves in - there are bound to be issues, and one of them is that we've seen an increase in the number of workplace accidents."

With more than 53,000 workers employed by the Group, Abby and her team of 12 have their work cut out making sure that people at the high street stores as well as the distribution centres are suitably trained.

Not surprisingly, manual handling is one of the top issues for Abby, although thanks to new techniques being taught, the Group has seen a 50 per cent cut in manual handling accidents in its stores and a 76 per cent reduction in the distribution depot where the new training was first introduced.

“Up until a while ago manual handling was a major concern across the workforce, but the new techniques - for example, to put one foot forward and to keep the object close to your body - has been revolutionary. In fact, so much so that manual handling is no longer the number one risk - it’s been overtaken by workers being struck by falling objects.”

The Group has launched an awareness campaign to highlight the dangers of falling stock, with leaflets and posters being distributed to help get the message across. It’s the stores rather than the distribution centres where falling stock is usually an issue, so the team is currently looking at different ways to store stock.

As well as the “hectic” Christmas holiday period, Abby has other busy times of the year, namely Easter and the catalogue launches for Argos.

“We do see spikes in our accident figures during these periods. If you take Argos as an example, once the new catalogue is published all the stock has to be cleared from our 735 stores and replaced by the new stock.

“Logistically, it’s a busy time so more accidents tend to happen and these periods impact on our time, in terms of training and risk assessments.”

Despite the increase in accidents during the festive period for the workforce, Abby says that accidents to shoppers in Argos stores are minimal.

“The customer accident rates in our stores, I would think, have to be among the lowest compared with other shops. Nine times out of ten, Argos customers don’t need to browse because they’ve seen what they want in the catalogue so they spend less time in the store.”

Another important focus for Abby and her team is their delivery drivers, who are not only trained in driver safety, but also in dynamic risk assessment, particularly for those who make home deliveries.

“We work closely with our third parties and they’ve trained their drivers and given them the tools necessary to make individual assessments. For example, if a driver gets to a house that has a steep driveway, it may be necessary for them to say ‘no, this driveway is unsafe’ and make other arrangements. You have to empower people to make a decision and be pragmatic.”

The relationship between the unions, workers and senior management, believes Abby, is the key ingredient to making sure safety always stays at the top of the agenda.

“The directors here are very health and safety-focused and they recognise and see accidents as the impact they have on individuals. And we employ worker ‘champions’ across our stores and distribution centres so that people can go and see them with a specific issue. This not only makes for good communication, but also for a continued relationship between all the different parties.”

Factfile

- Abby has been an IOSH member for more than 20 years and belongs to the London Metropolitan Branch and the IOSH Retail and Distribution Group
- Home Retail Group incorporates both Argos and Homebase which demerged in 2007 from GUS
- Abby is chair of the British Retail Consortium Risk and Safety Policy Action Group

Links

- [Home Retail Group](#)
- [British Retail Consortium](#)

Spotlight: safe as Houses

A week is a long time in politics. The Houses of Parliament has just seen the Queen’s formal opening ceremony for the new session, a police search and fallout from the investigation into Tory frontbencher Damian Green. There aren’t many IOSH members who can safely say that their workplace is in the news every day.

We talked to Marianne McDougall, Head of Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare at Parliament, in the week of the State Opening. Preparing for this event, a landmark occasion in the year, and the return of the Lords and MPs after recess, is always a busy time for the team.

“Getting ready for this time of year can be very hectic. During recess we still have people working here - plus some of the million or so visitors we get every year. But when the Lords and MPs come back the amount of people working on the site rises to thousands.”

“We all find the ceremonies, such as the State Opening and the Lord Chancellor’s breakfast, really

exciting events to get involved with as well as watching.”

The Parliament building is still searched by the Yeomen of the Guard each November, just before the State Opening, to make sure no latter-day Fawkes is concealed in the cellars, but this is a picturesque custom rather than a serious anti-terrorist precaution!

About 2,000 people are employed at the Parliament, but other passholders, including contractors and the press, can take the total number working on the Estate much higher.

“Providing safety to the Houses of Parliament is like being in a team that’s assigned to manage the risks of a small town, as we have so many services and utilities.”

The Parliament Estate isn’t just somewhere to work – there are social clubs, bars, restaurants and cafes. Some officers and staff of the Houses have apartments on the site.

“Two things make this role so interesting and diverse – the heritage aspect and the reason why the building is here in the first place. The UK Parliament has a long history and is an iconic building – it’s a world heritage site as well as being home to our government. We have to make sure that our risk management strategy takes this into account. It can sometimes be a difficult balancing act with the constraints we face.”

Despite working in such an iconic building, Marianne and her colleagues tackle the same issues as any health and safety team.

“There isn’t a standard day as plenty of different things crop up, alongside the more common issues. For example, we have lots of people using computers, lifting things or working from height. We provide catering services to thousands of people each day so there are the risks related to that sort of work too, on top of major building and maintenance projects.”

The Palace of Westminster contains 1,100 rooms, 100 staircases and 4.8 km of corridors. Parts of the Houses of Parliament date back almost a thousand years.

“There are obviously constraints on what we can do to the fabric of the building. Any changes or updates that we want to make have to be considered from this angle, which can take extra time, particularly during the planning stage.”

The site has a conservation architect and this help is “invaluable” in making sure that the building is modernised as much as possible.

“Considerable thought has gone into the location of fire escapes, alarms and fire fighting equipment.”

The majority of the buildings are accessible to people with disabilities. There are lifts and ramps so that people can move around the building easily, and there are induction loops in the committee rooms and chambers.

Marianne and the occupational health, safety and welfare team are currently working with senior managers in both Houses on a ‘revitalising’ project which incorporates National Director for Health and Work Professor Dame Carol Black’s recently published wellbeing agenda. The team is also updating in-house policies and guidance notes so that they are less wordy and easier to understand.

“I’m a big advocate of plain English and we’re rewriting our key documents with a view to getting them Crystal-marked for clarity. I think that it’s so important that all professionals stop using jargon and communicate clearly and unambiguously.”

“Since working at the Parliament I must admit that I’ve changed my outlook on Parliament’s role. From graduating as a scientist I was totally ignorant of much of our country’s history, but now I find it fascinating. During our ‘Learning at work’ week earlier this year, I discovered that the Houses of Parliament employs so many dedicated and interesting people who do amazing jobs and talk about them with enthusiasm. It’s a stunning place to work.”

Factfile:

- Marianne has been a member of IOSH since 1991
- She is a Chartered member and belongs to the IOSH Public Services Group
- The Palace of Westminster was largely rebuilt in the mid 1800s after a fire destroyed the old buildings
- Because the Palace of Westminster is a royal palace, commoners aren’t “allowed” to die there. Bodies are taken to nearby St Thomas’s Hospital where deaths are certified
-

60 second interview

Mark Trodd, Health, Safety and Security Advisor for the Tate Gallery, talks to Connect

What’s one of the most memorable experiences you’ve had in your health and safety career?

Risk assessing challenging exhibitions - particularly ones that don’t fit into the normal mould!

What issues can you see coming up in your sector?

Galleries and museums have become more popular, so we're looking at innovative ways of keeping the public safe

Would you like to see any legal changes in your sector?

There should be more legislation that's slanted towards visitor care and the public environment. At the moment it's very much geared towards the industrial sector so it's sometimes hard for the enforcing authority making a judgment. I think it's about getting more expertise for everyone

What approach to your job sets you aside from the perceived public image of health and safety people being bureaucratic busybodies?

We have to have a more pragmatic approach and try to base it on real life situations. We mostly deal with adults but we can only go so far in protecting them as they have responsibility for themselves

What's it like working with precocious artists?

It's enjoyable and sometimes enlightening to have the opportunity to work within a visitor-orientated organisation and consult and liaise with a diverse range of people spreading the safety message

Do you want to be considered for a 60 Second Interview? Contact the [e-Editor](#).

Quote me

IOSH gets its message across...

This week we focus on the Channel 4 Cutting Edge documentary called The Fun Police, screened on Thursday 4 December.

Channel 4 'The Fun Police'

IOSH immediate past president Ray Hurst appeared on the Channel 4 programme The Fun Police to highlight how, through sponsoring the World Conker Championships, health and safety professionals are busting the myth that playing conkers is banned. He said:

"We want to destroy the killjoy image. We, as safety professionals, are prepared to have fun. It's going to be an enormous event and typical of what I call quirky, British sportsmanship."

As expected, the programme provoked a lot of discussion among IOSH members with some feeling it was "about the best programme we could get in today's climate". Other members felt it was "entirely as expected" and some pointed out it "just perpetuated the myth that safety officers are dull bureaucrats".

However, many commentators took a more sympathetic line than that of the programme itself.

AA Gill, in his Sunday Times column, said:

"We trust that our tea is unadulterated, our electrics are earthed, the boiler has a flue and the lift was checked last week. All that is down to health and safety. If you're in the business of making documentaries about the lives of ordinary people, then there are far more deserving candidates for the box's mighty ire and odium than these boring but valiant public servants who're so easily and thoughtlessly teased."

Nick Bradshaw, reviewing the programme on Teletext, said he had a "new TV hero" and that Ed Friend's response to a certain newspaper columnist's comparison of the profession to the Stasi "made Littlejohn sound like an ill-informed buffoon."

David Belcher, in the Glasgow Herald, said the programme convinced him "we need more Ed Friends, not fewer."

Patricia Wynn Davies from The Daily Telegraph said the work of health and safety officers was "quite heartbreaking" and that "their intentions are quite noble." She added:

"Perhaps it's worth considering too, whether they are any more to blame for our risk-obsessed culture than insurers and an increasingly litigious public?"

Meanwhile, Robert Hanks in The Independent said: "This being TV, it strikes me as entirely possible that in pointing out danger on every hand, Ed was only doing what he had been asked to do."

"It would have been nice if, at some point, the film had paused to give us a few hard facts: how

many people are killed at work every year? How has that number changed in recent years? How many health and safety inspectors are there? And perhaps it could have given a little more consideration to what causes the excesses of 'health and safety culture'. It's not, by and large, a nanny state trying to swaddle us all in red tape, but the fear of litigation; not trying to avoid accidents, but trying to avoid being blamed for them."

Edinburgh Evening News/The Scotsman

Andrew Sharman, Chairman of the Edinburgh Branch and an IOSH Trustee, wrote to the Edinburgh Evening News and The Scotsman about his branch's recent debate at Holyrood. He said:

"An extraordinary thing happened in Edinburgh last week - a panel of speakers from the Scottish Parliament, the Institute of Directors, the HSE and the legal profession agreed on something. And the topic was health and safety.

"It's important to shout about success in health and safety to balance out all the negative stories of health and safety killjoys."

Yorkshire Branch

Judith Hackitt, Chair of the HSE, spoke at the Yorkshire Branch's annual seminar. She said:

"One of the saddest things about where we find ourselves this century is that bureaucracy has proliferated in the name of health and safety, or rather elf 'n' safety. We need to draw a clear distinction between that which is real health and safety - stopping people getting killed, injured or made ill by work - and the jobsworths who shamelessly use health and safety as an excuse.

"You know that the subject we all care about is not about banning conkers. You may all be familiar with the fuss over the Ripon Cathedral pancake race and how the story was gleefully seized on by the press. I hope you know that was not real health and safety because we're not in the business of stopping things but actually enabling them to be done more safely and efficiently. This ranges from finding better ways to help emergency services to perform risk assessments and anticipate problems before they find themselves in life or death situations so that they can quickly adopt the right measures, to enabling small firms to comply with legal requirements in a simple, proportionate manner."

Rail industry conference

Theresa Villiers MP, Conservative Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, said that accident investigations in the rail industry needed to be speeded up to encourage a greater shift from car to train. She said:

"We don't want to undermine the quality of investigations, but the fact the Potters Bar relatives are still waiting, six years after the accident, to find out answers doesn't help the long and difficult process of recovering from their loss."

Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, Norman Baker MP, added:

"We have to make rail more attractive and the closure of the rail for engineering purposes does not help. Every time the railway is closed and diversions or substitute buses put on, it puts people off rail travel and they make the decision to take their car instead. We need to get to a 24/7 rail system while not compromising safety."

Ian Prosser, the director of rail safety at the Office of Rail Regulation, told delegates:

"We still killed 15 track workers and there have already been a number this year. We are heading in the right direction but we must do better. I firmly believe in the concept of zero accidents being achievable, starting with fatalities and then moving down the accident chain."

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