

Babergh Worksafe



AUTUMN 2009



**SAFETY =
working together**

Workplaces across Babergh will soon be able to benefit from an increasingly simplified and more targeted health and safety inspection system. A recent Government drive to make the process of inspections more streamlined - and better targeted to individual businesses - is in the process of being rolled out across the district and the county. The simplification will cover a range of measures, one of which the database on which all Babergh businesses appear will be revised shortly - to reduce the category of inspections to three from the existing five.

Julian Halls, Babergh's Principal Food and Safety Officer, said: "It is probably not well appreciated but good premises have fewer inspections or, in some low risk cases, no inspections at all. "The vast majority of Babergh's premises are low-risk and this will not materially change but it has been recognised that a single high-risk activity will now be the over-riding score determinant as opposed to the simple total. "This change will be phased in over sometime."

In the meantime, businesses may receive a simple questionnaire to fill in which will help Babergh in determining whether your business is deemed to be of high or low risk.

Possible future inspections will be based on the information given on this questionnaire.

Mr Halls added: "Please fill the form in and return to Babergh as soon as possible as it will probably save you and the Council valuable time, but having said that please do ▶

BABERGH WORKSAFE



FIRTH'S FOCUS

In this testing time for Local Government, health and safety, and enforcement in general, is under pressure to do more with less - and hooray I hear you say.

That said, an accident at work or a damaged child demands immediate response and robust enforcement - otherwise Babergh would be failing in its duty of care to members of the public.

Mix this with the constant criticisms faced by local authorities

that are unfairly castigated for carrying out routine and allegedly unnecessary investigations. So we are damned if we do and damned if we don't.

This edition's articles reflect the modern thinking about joint working with other agencies and better targeting of interventions where they are needed.

Babergh is - as are other local authorities across Suffolk - an open and transparent organisation and we believe we are proportionate in our investigations

and any subsequent enforcement actions.

And, given the low levels of prosecution, we have to recognise that on the whole we, as a District, are pretty safe.

This is in no small measure the result of your hard work, coupled with a bit of checking from us from time to time.

Well done and let us hope in this time of financial pressure to cut corners and maximise profit, we all stay focussed on safety at the same time.

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► contact us if you have any general queries which can often be resolved over the phone.”

This latest drive has come on the back of a current work arrangement where local authority officers act as agents for the Health and Safety Executive. This project was trialled across Babergh last year and has now gone on to being rolled out across the country. It uses local authority officers acting on behalf of the HSE on the ground for immediate and dangerous issues. Julian added: “Who inspects what is strictly controlled by the law but it was recognised that where officers can respond quickly and competently they are empowered to do so.

“Suffolk's scheme, which was extremely successful, also allows officers to act as specialist advisers to other local authorities where necessary too.”

If you have any further queries or clarifications on health and safety inspections in the workplace, please contact Julian Halls on (01473) 825892 or email: julian.halls@babergh.gov.uk



CARRY ON CONKERING

'Elf and safety do it again !

How often do you see this headline in the national press? Is Babergh overzealous and is it true that what we do is unnecessary?

In fact when such stories are closely examined you often find that such restrictions reported are urban myths and any retraction is always buried in small print and is, not surprisingly, missed.

There are many common misconceptions. Ladders for short duration jobs are perfectly acceptable and have not been banned - and neither has playing conkers. Fireman's poles have not been 'pole-axed' and safety signs are not required for every situation.

In fact I would much rather see a piece of foam attached to a low beam than a warn-

For information - it's new versus old!

An information poster aimed at informing employees of their health and safety rights that businesses have to adhere to is being simplified.

The poster includes basic health and safety information and lets people know who is responsible for health and safety in your workplace.

Babergh anticipates that several companies will begin approaching businesses within the district, incorrectly stating the

need to buy and display a new poster - or risk prosecution.

In fact the old poster will be fine until April 2014 - as long as it remains readable, and it does not need to be provided at all if an explanatory leaflet is given, on an individual basis, to employees when they first join an organisation.

Businesses should record which method is being used and if the company employs ethnic minorities the leaflets, which are

available in several languages, can be particularly useful.

Employers must display the poster where workers can easily read it - and it must be in a readable condition. Employers must also include some contact details, for example of your local enforcing authority. This could be the Local Authority or the HSE. Businesses that are not sure can ring Babergh and an officer will help with any queries.



New safety pack to head off workplace injuries

A new information pack - being introduced for distribution at the planning application stage - is aiming to help minimise the occurrence of workplace injuries.

Babergh is just one of several local authorities across Suffolk taking part in the Health and Safety Executive's Local Authority Construction Engagement (LACE) project.

The project has recognised that construction still accounts for the majority of workplace injuries and it wants to raise awareness of health and safety at the planning application stage of projects. The executive has produced a free information pack for construction contractors and homeowners planning developments.

Julian Halls, Babergh's Principal Food and Safety Officer, said: "As customers, and contractors, these packs can be of considerable value in accurately assessing whether a job is being safely done around you and in compliance with the law.

"Some case studies illustrated where simple and low cost changes have resulted in avoidance of almost certain accidents at a later date.

"Good examples would be changes to very pretty but glass like slippery floors and the introduction of a one way system to keep pedestrians away from vehicles."

Topics covered in the information packs include the requirements of CDM, roof work, working with asbestos guidelines and are an 'absolutely essential toolkit for the small construction contractor'.

A limited stock of these packs is available from Babergh. You can do this by contacting Julian Halls, Babergh's Principal Food and Safety Officer, on (01473) 825892 or by e-mailing julian.halls@babergh.gov.uk.

ing sign, to stop injuries occurring in the first place.

If you feel at any stage that you are being asked to do something which is unnecessary, just give this office a call to check. Babergh is not selling anything and has no hidden agendas and will not ask you to do anything which is not required by law.

Officers at Babergh may recommend you do something - but we will always make it clear that is a recommendation. Our role is to work with you and not against you - and one prosecution in 10 years is hardly overzealous.

■ Julian Halls, Babergh's Principal Food and Safety Officer, (01473) 825892 or email: julian.halls@babergh.gov.uk



Cockle pickers working on the sands of Morecambe Bay, Lancashire. Eighteen Chinese cockle pickers drowned here in 2004

Local authorities working to protect migrant workers

More rigorous monitoring of the employment rights of migrant workers in the district could make sure that another tragedy – similar to the infamous Morecambe Bay deaths – does not occur.

Babergh District Council, along with all local authorities in Suffolk, is taking part in a joint initiative to make sure migrant workers aren't exploited or forced to accept poor pay and dangerous working conditions.

This type of exploitation was catapulted into the limelight when the deaths of 18 cockle pickers, all from China, in the waters of Morecambe Bay in 2004, were reported across the world.



Since this tragedy, it has been recognised many migrant workers were being exploited in this manner and their sometimes dubious immigration status meant they didn't have the same level of employment rights as their UK counterparts. This is simply not true. As part of a joint initiative, the Health

and Safety Executive and all local authorities in the region, are now looking very carefully at employment agencies, contracts of employment and are checking to see if workers are being protected.

In particular, the latest push is on hand car washing facilities which are popping up everywhere and seem to have large numbers of ethnic minorities as staff.

The law is very clear that employers must make arrangements for these employees so that they are clear as to their legal rights and how to work safely. This could be done by translations or by working with someone who can supervise and speak their language.