



Statement from the GPMU Executive Committee

Health and Safety in Paper Mills

The GPMU EC views with considerable alarm and dismay the death of Tommy Skye, at Georgia Pacific, Bridgend, on 6th July, 2001. This was the second death in the paper industry in only 2 months, and accompanies a health and safety record for the paper industry as a whole which has not improved sufficiently, in spite of a 3 year Paper and Board Industry Advisory Committee (PABIAC) campaign across the industry, to cut accidents by at least 50%.

The GPMU EC accepts that some mills have performed considerably better than others, and that some have made improvements better than, or equal to, those sought by PABIAC. For this reason the GPMU EC supports the policy adopted by PABIAC, and now being pursued by the Health and Safety Executive, to target the poorest performing mills which contribute most to the poor accident rate for the industry.

The GPMU pledges its full support to the HSE in seeking the implementation of Making Paper Safely in UK paper mills. In connection with this the GPMU will actively support any Improvement Notices, Prohibition Notices and Prosecutions issued by the HSE.

The GPMU expects health and safety improvements to be made in all papermills, but will prioritise the poorest performing mills. In doing so the GPMU will take into account the target list of mills agreed by PABIAC, but will not be bound by this list. In the first instance the GPMU has already used this list to hold a meeting of GPMU representatives from target mills.

Health and safety requirements

The GPMU EC requires that:

- All mills have in place, and operating, the Health and Safety Immediate Action Guidelines agreed nationally between the GPMU and the Paper Federation and issued in July, 2000. The deadline for this to be achieved is 31st December, 2001. If after that date any target mill has not implemented the guidelines the disputes procedure will be invoked.
- All mills consult with and involve GPMU appointed representatives in
 - setting health and safety policy
 - the development of Mill Action Plans
 - "Making Paper Safely" teams, and in guarding design and decisions
 - risk assessments
 - incident/accident investigation
 - health and safety auditing

In doing this, mills will need to fully accept the legal rights of GPMU appointed safety reps, and provide them with the necessary time off to fulfil these functions and participate in the above health and safety activities.

- All mills take urgent steps to ensure that all managers at all levels fully accept their legal duty to manage health and safety. Mills must support their managers in this role through the provision of appropriate training and information, and through the demonstrable support of Chief Executives and Senior managers.

The GPMU will support this activity and also promote, and where necessary facilitate, joint, in-house training of safety reps and supervisors in health and safety. Such support will be in addition to, and not a replacement for, existing GPMU policy that all safety reps are trained to TUC Stage 1 and 2, and given the opportunity to train to higher levels in health and safety.

It is essential that H&S training is not seen as an end in itself, but is the means by which improved approaches to health and safety are implemented in the workplace.

GPMU Safety Rep action

GPMU safety reps will continue to identify, and persist in identifying, any aspects of the employers health and safety arrangements that fail to meet established standards, with particular reference to Making Paper Safely. Some criticism has been levelled at GPMU reps who have tacitly accepted inadequate health and safety measures. The EC calls on all safety reps to answer this by formally identifying all such shortcomings to employers, and doing this repeatedly until the matters are resolved.

The GPMU EC also gives notice to mills that it will support any Chapels that, after consultation with Branches, issue local deadlines for the implementation of specific health and safety measures, including Making Paper Safely requirements. These will take the form of GPMU Chapel Improvement Notices. These will indicate the date by which stated improvements are required, and after which, specified action will be taken. Chapel Improvement Notices will only be issued if all other avenues have been explored and failed.

The GPMU will give full support to Chapels and Branches in actions to improve health and safety in paper mills. If matters can not be resolved within the existing arrangements, or using the Immediate Action Guidelines, Chapels will have no alternative but to register a failure to agree, and put health and safety issues into the disputes procedure.

The GPMU EC is not happy that it has had to make these statements, but they are necessary if we are to reduce the level of deaths, injuries and suffering faced by GPMU members in paper mills. GPMU members in other industries do not face the same level of risk on a day to day basis.

GPMU commitment to partnership

The GPMU EC maintains its commitment to working in partnership on health and safety at National, Branch and Chapel level in the paper industry. The GPMU will continue to support in the strongest way the tripartite work of PABIAC, and work as closely as possible with the Paper Federation and individual Groups and Companies in promoting health and safety in the paper industry.

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