

Research update

Simon Armitage of the Health and Safety Executive provides an overview of HSE research

The Health and Safety Commission and Executive (HSC/E) were established as a result of the Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. Their aims are to protect the health, safety and welfare of employees, and to safeguard others, principally the public, who may be exposed to risks from work activities. This is reflected in the HSC/E Mission Statement: 'to ensure that risks to people's health and safety from work activities are properly controlled'.

In pursuit of their mission, HSC/E use science and technology 'to develop and apply science and technology to provide a sound, independent knowledge base to evaluate the risks to people's health and safety from work activities and the means to assess and control these risks in order to help achieve HSC/E's objectives' (S&T Mission Statement). The risk creators are responsible for control, but the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), as the regulator, has the role of better defining the standards and challenging actual practice.

The 'Act' requires the HSC to 'make such arrangements as it considers appropriate for the carrying out of research, the publication of results of research, and the provision of training and information....'. The HSE fulfils these functions on HSC's behalf and has a wide-ranging programme of research and development and technical support, covering all the industries for which it has regulatory responsibilities.

The bulk of the HSE's research expenditure is extramural, and at any one time there are around 600 on-going projects involving more than 200 different contractors. The HSE also commissions work from its in-house agency, the *Health and Safety Laboratory*¹ Details of projects currently underway or recently completed can be found in the *Mainstream Projects' Handbook*² or in the *Nuclear Research Index*³ for work on Nuclear Safety. Regular newsletters are also produced which provide details of newly commissioned and recently completed projects^{4,5,6}.

In 2001/02, the HSE plans to spend about

£20.5 million on research in addition to research funded through the HSE by industry.

Funding for most of this research comes from grant-in-aid from Government and through collaboration with industry and the European Community. However, funding for nuclear safety research is derived from licence fees and a levy on the nuclear industry.

Research is commissioned on a rolling basis and for 2001/02, around 70% of the available budget is already committed to projects commissioned in previous years. It follows, therefore, that there is significant competition for funds from the HSE's research budget. Research procurement procedures operate in a rigorous competitive regime and any proposals for single tender have to be justified by the commissioning customer against defined criteria. The HSE does not award grants.

At present, The Executive's research is managed as four portfolios (Health, Engineering, Major Hazards and Risk Assessment, and Behavioural and Social Sciences), each of which has a number of constituent subject research groups overseeing research in a particular technical area.

The current research interests and anticipated research requirements are set out in the *Mainstream Research Market Document*⁷ From

April 2002, there is to be a shift away from the technical subject approach and HSE research will be organised as blocks of activity (Priority Programmes, Work in the Major Hazards Industries, Securing Compliance and Mandatory Activities), as described in the HSC/E's *Strategic Plan*⁸ Details of the new arrangements can be found in the HSE's *Science and Innovation Strategy*⁹ It is intended that these changes will make more transparent the link between HSE's research activity and its business aims and objectives.

The need to: keep abreast of new and fast changing technologies, throwing up new health and safety issues; responding to changes in the socially acceptable level of risk; developing guidance and assisting in the formulation of new or revised standards, and negotiating international directives, all bear directly on the HSE's research needs.

Last year the Government and HSC published *Revitalising Health and Safety*¹⁰ and *Securing Health Together*¹¹ which set a number of outcome targets for improving health and safety performance over the next 10 years.

The targets are for the health and safety system as a whole, but they will be a major factor in determining HSC/E's future programmes of activity. The HSC/E *Strategic Plan*⁸ includes a Public Service Agreement (PSA) which covers these priorities. This will be updated annually and will focus on those outcomes that need to be delivered in order to achieve the PSA and so meet the targets.

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References

1. Further details Health and Safety Laboratory: (<http://www.hsl.gov.uk>)
2. HSE's website: (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/content/progress/mrph/2001.pdf>)
3. HSE's website at: (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/nsd/resindex/index.htm>)
4. Mainstream Research News, HSE website at: (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/frameset/mrn.htm>)
5. Offshore Research Focus: (<http://www.orf.co.uk>)
6. Nuclear Safety Research News: Nuclear Safety Directorate homepage, HSE website: (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/nsd/nsdhome.htm>)
7. HSE website: (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/frameset/opp/mrm2001.htm>)
8. Soon to be available on HSE website: (<http://www.hse.gov.uk>)
9. As above
10. Document available at (<http://www.ohstrategy.net>)
11. HSE website: (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/revital/index.htm>)

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