



Peter Fielding

Local Authority Partnership Liaison Officer, Leeds

It all began back in 2005. We were looking for ideas on how to 'do' partnership working better, so we asked our inspectors for suggestions. This was one of them.

Basically, a local authority signs up to hold a full week of awareness-raising events, backed up by inspection and enforcement, focusing on topics most relevant to the businesses it regulates in that particular area. The authority also gets HSE on board, both to contribute resources and expertise and to ensure its own priorities (mainly Fit3) and those workplaces it regulates are included.

At the moment, Safer Working Communities is only being run in Yorkshire and the North East (the current one in York is the fourth we've held so far).

Our aim is to achieve sustainable improvements in health and safety within each chosen community. We do this by building partnerships – not just between HSE and the local authority, but with a whole range of stakeholders who share the same aims and objectives as us (other regulators, the emergency services, training organisations, industry bodies etc). And so far, I've been amazed at how many stakeholders we've identified, and how eager they are to work with us.

We start planning for an event like this by identifying stakeholders and themes and building up an idea of the type of events we want to run. Then we meet stakeholders to explain what Safer Working Communities is about and ask them what they want to achieve from it, and what they can contribute to the mix.

Next, we put together an event programme, which we discuss with stakeholders and fine-tune accordingly. To get things rolling, we hold a week of HSE/local authority joint themed inspections, with the emphasis on enforcement and advice (they're also a great opportunity to promote what we're doing and direct dutyholders to relevant events).

Finally, there's the event week itself. But getting people to attend isn't our main measure of success – instead, it's the number of stakeholders who get involved and the relationships built up that matter. The week itself is really only the beginning.

I'm now approaching the end of my two-year secondment here. One of the things I've learnt during that time is that the scope for joint working is immense. Together, we've done a lot over the last couple of years to break down barriers and build mutual trust and respect.

Working on the Safer Working Communities project has been challenging but very rewarding, and I look forward to holding an event of our own when I return to my 'day job' back in Wakefield.

'Partnership working'; 'engaging with stakeholders' – all very laudable, but what does it actually achieve?

If the Safer Working Communities initiative is anything to go by, the answer is 'a heck of a lot!'

Partnership, partnership, partnership



Steve Adamthwaite (left) and David Snowball get to grips with manual handling at the first event of the week at the Guildhall, York

Steve Adamthwaite

Principal Officer (Health and Safety), York City Council

We've been working in partnership with HSE for the last two years – two enforcing authorities sharing common goals (it's just that we inspect different types of premises).

Over that time, we've built up really good working relationships, through routine inspections and during national campaigns – so much so that sometimes we see ourselves almost as one authority.

It's good to be able to call on the considerable resources HSE can offer, especially when you consider that we only have two people here doing solely health and safety inspections. And HSC's Strategy provides a steer when we're

prioritising our work. We've been inundated over the last couple of weeks with people wanting to know more about Safer Working Communities. It's reassuring to know they're willing to give up their time and come along here to listen to what we've got to say. I just hope they go away satisfied and put what they've learnt into practice.

David Snowball

Regional Director, FOD Yorkshire and North East

Partnership, partnership, partnership (to misquote Tony Blair) – that's what this initiative is all about.

In the past, the HSE/local authority relationship wasn't always based on mutual trust. But Safer Working Communities shows that we can and will work together, and that's down in large part to the good work of our Partnership Team (David Cole, Peter Fielding (seconded from Wakefield Council) and Cain Mitchell). We're planning and doing things *together* now – it's no longer HSE taking the lead with local authorities as an add-on. And GNN (the Government News Network) has really got stuck into the publicity work with a vengeance.

HSE and LAs understand each other much better these days. The closer we can bring our agendas together, the more we'll achieve. Of course, there are structural barriers to overcome (HSE has national objectives and a single priority – health and safety – whereas LAs answer to more local pressures, and health and safety is just one of the areas they cover). But this initiative provides plenty of scope for local discretion and allows staff to do some really interesting and imaginative work.

Anita Stone

Environmental Health Officer, York City Council

Small businesses find health and safety quite a challenge. They're afraid to ask for help for fear of enforcement. That's why, for this initiative, the emphasis is on advice.

Our focus for much of the week is the catering and leisure industry (tourism means York has endless food businesses – around 1900 at the last count), where slips and trips and manual handling account for most of the accidents. We want to show how much these accidents cost, and what can be done to prevent

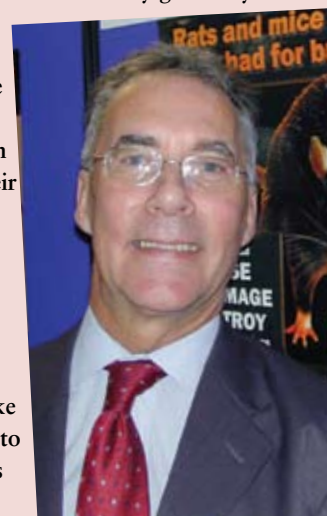
them. It's not the sexiest of subjects, which makes it all the more pleasing to see that we had a full house for our first day's event (it shows that people really *do* think it's worth taking health and safety seriously).

I'm grateful to all the stakeholders who've come along to support Safer Working Communities with their offers of free advice and training, raffle prizes and the like. And I hope that, as a result, during future inspections we'll find that people are more aware of their health and safety duties and have taken steps to improve matters.

Barry White

Rentokil Business Development for the North

People tend not to think about pest control ... until they have a problem, that is. And it's often like that with health and safety generally. If we can get people to start thinking about workplace issues more, it'll be good for them and good for their business. Events like this are a great way to get some important messages across, break down barriers and make a real difference to working people's lives.



Richard Wade

Director, Corporate Safety Solutions Ltd

For many small businesses, things like health and safety and food hygiene can be a minefield. I've come here not just to sell our health and safety risk management consultancy's services, but to offer free help and advice to the people who need it most. Hopefully, if businesses follow the easy, cost-effective solutions on offer today, inspectors who come knocking on their doors won't find serious issues that could lead to fines, prosecution or possibly imprisonment.



One initiative trialled at an earlier event (Drifffield, East Yorkshire) was the ladder amnesty. Local hire company Elcocks offered a discount on a new ladder for every defective one handed in. 'We took 75 defective ladders out of use, and the store sold out of new ones', explains Principal Inspector Gill Spurrier, pictured here with environmental health officer Paul Mears (left) and John Roberts from Elcocks. The scheme will be rolled out nationally later this year.

Nicola Callaghan

Site Safety Manager, Nestlé York

Nestlé is a large organisation. Smaller companies don't have the same resources, so it's good to be able to come along here today and share some of the things we've done to reduce slips and trips and manual handling risks so that others can apply these solutions in their own workplace. If it helps the local community, then it's time well spent.



David Bryant

Workplace Health Connect

Workplace Health Connect is expanding into North Yorkshire this month, so today's event is a great way to publicise the service. WHC's aim is to raise awareness and get people to introduce simple control measures to reduce harm in the workplace – exactly what this current initiative is all about. Needless to say, I think today has been a great success – let's have more of the same.



Doing his bit to prove that HSE isn't risk averse... Neil Hope-Collins, an inspector from the Leeds office, raised a few eyebrows and generated some good publicity at the launch of the next event (Calderdale, starting 26 February) with his party-piece – juggling fire while still-walking!



Andrea Lowe (left) and Anita Stone pictured in December at the sign-up event for the York week at the city's very own 'Eye'

Andrea Lowe

Inspector, Leeds

I've worked with Anita a lot recently, so was more than happy to get involved. Her original plans covered only the catering and leisure industries, so my first job was to arrange something for *our* dutyholders to ensure that manufacturing and agriculture were included (agriculture is quite big in this area, so we agreed to hold a midweek farm event).

To entice our audience to turn up, we needed to show what's in it for them, so we really pushed the 'easy, cheap solutions' on offer. It's also good to have the bigger industry players on hand to share some of their 'trade secrets' – something the smaller businesses really seemed to appreciate.

We got some good publicity when GNN arranged for BBC Radio York to shadow an inspection Anita and I did at a Yorkshire brewery. We expected it to be pretty uneventful, but ended up serving an improvement notice. Fortunately, the manager was very positive about the whole experience (something along the lines of 'We knew we had a problem; we just needed a prod to do something about it...'). It was only a five-minute slot, but we managed to get our main messages across.

So, it's been hard work but really enjoyable. My thanks go to Anne Quinn (admin) and Bev Ward (our health and safety awareness officer) for their support throughout.