

North York Moors National Park Authority Finance, Risk, Audit and Standards Committee

16 November 2020

Health and Safety

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update Members on health and safety activity so far during 2020/21 and the way in which the health and safety issues arising from COVID 19 are being managed.

2. Background

- 2.1 This report is the quarterly update on accident statistics, progress against the agreed health and safety action plan and a commentary on other health and safety activity. While this paper will more closely follow the usual format than the most recent papers, it will consider the actions put in place to ensure that activities are undertaken safely while COVID 19 continues to be a significant issue.

3. Sickness Absence

- 3.1 Generally, sickness absence has continued to be significantly lower than normal during this period as illustrated by the figures below;

1 April – 31 October 2019 201 days reported

1 April – 31 October 2020 98 days reported

- 3.2 65 of the 98 days reported absence have been as a result of one colleague having a longer term illness. This matter is now resolved and the individual concerned has left the Authority.

- 3.3 It was reported last time that two colleagues had been confirmed as having C-19 and had made a full recovery. There has been no change to this number over the last 2 months, although a number have self-isolated due to contact with somebody, usually within their household, who has been confirmed as having the virus. Staff who have self-isolated have been able to continue working from home.

4. Accidents and Near Misses

- 4.1 At the last meeting, Members were informed of a potentially dangerous incident that occurred on 15 July. A staff member loaded a trailer at Sutton Bank and was towing it back to Helmsley, when a wheel came off the trailer causing the vehicle/trailer to jack knife on the A170. There were no injuries as a result of the incident.

- 4.2 The incident has been fully investigated by the Head of Recreation and Ranger Services, together with the staff member involved and their line manager. The results of the investigation have also been considered by a Health and Safety sub group with external input from NYCC. It was agreed that at this meeting Members would be updated regarding the conclusions following the investigation. The paragraphs below are the relevant extracts from the final report;

'Immediate Cause of the Accident - *The wheel became detached from the trailer - wheel nuts appear to have worked themselves loose.*

Underlying Cause of the Accident - It is not clear what caused the wheel nuts to become loose, or at what point this happened. Possible causes:

- failure to adequately tighten after a member of staff changed a wheel;
- Ryedale Trailers failed to tighten wheel nuts fully at February service;
- malicious interference;
- other unknown cause.

The members of staff involved followed the correct procedures for pre-use checks and towing but did not notice anything to suggest that the wheel nuts were unsafe.

A possible contributing factor is that the trailer was overloaded or unevenly loaded, although evidence is inconclusive.

The accident took place during an extremely busy period for the Western Ranger Team, who were carrying out major work at Sutton Bank, dealing with daily antisocial behaviour problems at Lake Gormire and Sheepwash, experiencing a high volume of prowl problem reports and planning the upcoming replacement of 9 bridges.

Root Causes - The way the Authority uses equipment and machinery has changed significantly in recent years. More users access equipment and power tools from Sawmill Lane, including volunteers and Conservation staff. Shared and heavily used equipment means additional wear and tear - the tipper trailer is a shared and heavily used item; other examples include trackbarrows and brushcutters which are used by a variety of staff and volunteers.

Maintenance of equipment and machinery is something that ranger staff have to find time for alongside a busy work programme on public rights of way. Staff are diligent about carrying out essential and routine maintenance, but a dedicated resource would ensure this work could be carried out in a more proactive and organised manner. More preventative maintenance and oversight would reduce equipment downtime, should reduce equipment failure and replacement costs, and would be expected to reduce the likelihood of accidents.

This is not to infer that negligence caused the wheel nuts to become loose – there is no evidence to suggest this, and all indications are that staff followed procedures correctly. However it would be remiss of us not to take this opportunity to look very closely at wider equipment management across the Authority and to make improvements where they can be identified.'

- 4.3 The accident investigation has highlighted a number of recommendations to prevent a recurrence of the accident and these are detailed in the table below. Officers will ensure that Members are updated on progress at future meetings;

Recommendations to Prevent Recurrence of the Accident			
Action to be taken to address root cause of accident:	Name of person to lead action:	Target date for completion:	Date completed:
Wheel nut tags have been fitted to all trailers and ranger service vehicles to ensure staff can carry out an effective visual check before use	Rangers - DT	1 Oct	30 September
Torque wrenches are available at each depot and trailers have wheel nut torque settings marked on an info tag for each trailer	Rangers - DT	1 Nov	1 November
Nose weight gauge purchased for each depot	Rangers - DT	30 Nov	
Annual training refreshers to include loading and weighing trailers (visit to weighbridge) This forms part of our assurance that staff are current and competent in trailer loading	Rangers - SPB	1 March	
Carry out six monthly additional safety checks of major equipment (inc. trailers) as part of winch checks	Rangers - SPB	1 March	
Better written records – good to go cards need to be kept after use	Rangers – All Senior Rangers	30 Nov onwards	
Clear message to practical staff about safety always taking precedence over completing the task at all costs	Managers, directors, CEO and H&S group	Immediate and ongoing	
Competence checks of our trailer service centre – checking quality of work over time and reviews from other customers	Rangers - DJS	Ongoing	
Provide additional resource to assist with machinery and equipment maintenance. Either establishing a split for maintenance rangers etc. for instance that they work 4.5 days on the ground and 0.5 days in the depot, and invest in training to embed a higher level of machinery maintenance skills; or create a part time post which can provide a dedicated resource to support the ranger team without loss of output	Rangers and IN/MG	1 March	

4.4 The number of accident and near miss reports continues to be much lower than in previous years. Staff have been reminded of the need to ensure that incidents are reported promptly.

5. **General Health and Safety Response to COVID 19**

- 5.1 Members have previously been made aware of the way in which the Authority has managed the health and safety aspects relating to COVID19. This work has continued since the last meeting of this Committee, with particular emphasis on improving the IT equipment and work stations for staff.
- 5.2 At the time of writing this report, there has been a significant shift in the Government's approach and a 4 week lockdown announced for England. Officers are preparing a proportionate response, fully following the revised guidance. This work is ongoing and a verbal update will be given at the meeting.

6. **Maintenance of Machinery**

- 6.1 At a previous meeting of this Committee, Members asked to be updated on the procedures in place to ensure that tools and equipment used in outdoor practical work are properly maintained. Developing a written policy is part of the 2020/21 health and safety action plan. While oversight of the maintenance of equipment is the responsibility of designated members of staff, the outcome of the investigation detailed in Section 4 of this report will result in further changes, including a formal written policy. The current processes are detailed below;

- **Power tools - chainsaws, hedge trimmers, strimmers and brushcutters**
Training covers maintenance, cleaning and daily checks. Daily checks are carried out before use, cleaning and maintenance carried out after use. Servicing and repair of parts is carried out by trained staff as per manufacturer's instructions or when a fault is identified.
- **Plant - mini digger, 360 excavator, trackbarrow** - Training covers daily checks. Daily checks carried out before use, cleaning and checks carried out after use. Servicing is carried out externally according to manufacturer's instructions or when a fault is identified.
- **Mowers - billygoat, flail mower, ride on and pedestrian mowers**
No formal training, but in-house familiarisation led by experienced staff covers daily checks to be carried out before and after use. Servicing is carried out externally according to manufacturer's instructions or when a fault is identified.
- **Trailers and vehicles** - Daily checks and weekly cleaning and check of trailers. Servicing of trailers according to levels of use by a local trailer company, servicing of vehicles annually and obviously when faults are identified.

- 6.2 The training in the use of key pieces of equipment and plant is fully documented with refresher time periods agreed annually by the Health and Safety Group. There are robust procedures in place to ensure that untrained staff do not have access to equipment such as plant, chainsaws and brushcutters. The training records provide a register of those authorised to use such kit. The health and safety refresher periods are rigorously enforced and appropriate training put in place. A designated member of staff is responsible for overseeing this aspect of health and safety work.

7. **2020/21 Action Plan**

- 7.1 The draft action plan was approved by Members in July. While COVID 19 related actions will continue to be a priority, work will be progressed on the other parts of the action plan as detail below in *italics*;
- Manage the Authority's activities in a way that is pragmatic but properly reflects the national guidance in relation to COVID 19. This includes the delivery of services to the public as well as putting in place safe working practices for staff and volunteers – *this work is ongoing and has become part of everyday working life. The key areas*

of activity are included in this report and continue to be underpinned by regularly updated risk assessments, changed working practices and so on;

- *Assess Corporate Health and Safety Performance using the LGA matrix and take actions as appropriate (next assessment Oct 2020) – this will take place when the new CEO has completed his initial induction programme and developed his understanding of health and safety matters.*
- *Assess the effectiveness of volunteer TDL training by; a) organising regular meetings of TDLs with health & safety as an agenda item; b) regular spot checking of activities which are led by TDLs; c) develop (by 31 December) and implement a timetable for the above 2 activities – meetings of TDLs have taken place and there has been involvement of TDLs in establishing c-19 working protocols. TDL activity has been significantly lower this year, and it is anticipated that this action will be extended into 2021/22.*
- *Develop and implement a programme of communication on health and safety matters for volunteers, using a variety of different communication methods (plan to be developed by 30 September, implementation then ongoing) – the programme of communication has concentrated on providing clear advice on c-19 working practices and explaining decision making. This action will be continued into 2021/22.*
- *Develop a written policy and schedule for the maintenance and repair of machinery – paragraphs 4 and 6 of this report refer to the current situation.*

8. Financial and Staffing Implications

- 8.1 Day to day health and safety management has become significantly more onerous as a result of COVID 19. Additional health and safety expenditure is being incurred on PPE, hand sanitiser, screens in public areas, cleaning and transport. A central budget code has been created for this expenditure to enable Officers to properly track the additional costs of operating at the current time.

9. Recommendation

9.1 That Members;

- Support and comment on the work undertaken since the last FRASC meeting.

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Background documents to this report

File ref.

The full health and safety investigatory report referred to in Part 4 of this report is available on request.