

Safetyline 88

H & S UPDATE APRIL 2008

Following on from the briefing in December's Safetyline, the **HSE** have now audited all the aspects of the University's operation that they intended to audit on this occasion. They have concluded their audits on slips and trips, asbestos management, sickness absence reporting and violence in NHS areas and have been generally satisfied with their findings to date and their recommendations are being addressed. Their audit of the management of stress are based on a review of the University's policies, procedures and initiatives to date and interviews with staff in four academic and four support departments and are still underway.

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*On 6<sup>th</sup> April 2008 the Noise at Work Regulations 2005 will apply to the **music and entertainment sectors** which until now were subject to the 1989 Regulations. Employers will be required to provide hearing protection when noise levels reach 85 decibels on a daily or weekly average, and will be required to assess risks to workers health and provide them with information and training when noise levels average 80 decibels. Further specific information for this sector can be found at [www.hse.gov.uk/noise/regulations.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/regulations.htm).*

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The **trial to restrict vehicle movement on the Concourse** at times of greatest pedestrian use is progressing smoothly with no significant problems to date. The trial on the adjacent Tower Court car park for coach parking on Open Days is proving less successful with significant problems being encountered by coaches trying to turn around and park, especially when cars are parked in the spaces required for coaches and when other delivery vehicles are present. A review meeting was held with relevant academic and professional services to get views on the problems they have identified in order to identify suitable alternative means of ensuring Open Days run smoothly whilst minimising risks and disruption for staff and maximising the experience for prospective students.

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*There has been some recent discussion on the use of **Perchloric Acid** for digestion of rock samples and the potential for fumes to precipitate out in fume cupboards or ventilation ductwork with the risk of an accumulation of explosive material. Also samples heated in Perchloric Acid can spontaneously explode. The consensus for safe operation of this procedure involves using a high quality fume cupboard (with no wood in it) with fumes vented through an extract system using a water scrubber to remove acid fumes. However, Perchloric Acid should never be used unless there is no suitable alternative. Some suggested the use of high speed (microwave) acid digestion which has developed significantly in the last decade. See 'Microwave Enhanced Chemistry Fundamentals', M.Kingston & S.J.Haswell American Chemical Society 1997.*

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An interesting **court case** was reported last month which indicates employers could be sued by employees who are injured when using equipment that was not provided or maintained by them. In the case of Smith v Northamptonshire County Council, a council driver injured an ankle as she pushed a wheelchair-bound patient down a wooden ramp at the patient's home. The edge of the ramp - which had not been installed by the local authority - crumbled, causing the driver to slip. She sued the council, claiming inadequate work equipment under the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998, and won. The judge ruled that the ramp was 'work equipment' under the regulations, and that it was inadequately maintained. Northamptonshire County Council appealed, believing there would be widespread implications should the appeal fail. A Court of Appeal judgment on the case is expected some time this month.

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A reminder to all Departments, **testing of portable electrical equipment is required by law** and you musty make appropriate arrangements to have all such equipment PAT tested.

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***Dr Christine Bull** joins Safety Services on 1st April as our new Radiation Protection Technician. Christine joins us from University College London where she worked in the Physics Department.*