

Initial summary report on the management of health & safety at the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) and the role of the Safety Advisor

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I Context and background

- 1.1 I am the Safety Adviser to the Peak District National Park Authority (since 2005). I also advise Northumberland National Park Authority (since April 2012) and represent National Park Authorities as a member of the Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group. I have recently (since November 2012) commenced work with SDNPA as Safety Adviser, providing an on-site service of some 15 days annually, supported with an unlimited service via email and telephone consultation.
- 1.2 In providing a similar service to a number of National Parks, it is anticipated that significant efficiency savings can be realised for all by sharing information, documents and systems of work. Consistency in the management of safety matters pertinent to NPs, aiming for an exemplary 'best practice' standard is a principle goal.
- 1.3 This is my first formal report to SDNPA. In this report I aim to confirm details of my first impressions of safety management at SDNPA, my role, proposed future work programme and some initial findings and priorities. I will subsequently provide a full annual report on safety, detailing work completed and proposing a continuing future work programme.
- 1.4 The SDNPA employs a broad range of people performing a number of very different jobs. Most of these jobs involve few serious risks to health or safety. However, the complexity of operations performed by the organisation and its employees, does include some significant risks and demands a well developed and well resourced system of oversight for all management, including for occupational health and safety.
- 1.5 Common difficulties among National Park Authorities and many others organisations are: the thorough implementation of identified safety measures and, systems that fail to clearly demonstrate where and how suitable and sufficient action has been taken (as auditors often show). Only a few exceptional organisations could claim to fully succeed in these respects. It is my aim that the National Parks I advise will all achieve this status.

2 Early days findings and first priorities

- 2.1 During my first few visits to SDNPA, I have met and spoken with many people involved in both the central, corporate management of health and safety and with discrete line management responsibilities for the same. I have also taken opportunities to visit all four regional area bases, attended two Health and Safety Group meetings and, so far, informally followed-up a few specific safety matters.

- 2.2 My first impressions are very positive. Both the organisation and people working within it generally appreciate their responsibilities and take safety seriously. Those matters that obviously require attention are, to some extent, being attended to.
- 2.3 It is very important, for any safety management system, that people readily report incidents (including near-misses) and accidents so that they can be properly considered and investigated and any lessons learned. While there is not necessarily a serious under-reporting problem at SDNPA, I will promote good incident reporting and seek to encourage this through information, training and the simplification of the reporting system.
- 2.4 A key consideration for all safety matters is the production and use of good risk assessments and other associated safety guidance. While there is generally, at least some such material available, much of it is out of date and there is a lack of consistency, often due to the document and system heritage.
- 2.5 A broad range of staff will be involved in the production of such documents, often with an equally broad range of ideas about how this should be done. While it is common/good practice to get those carrying out tasks to contribute to risk assessments, it is more successful, where practicable, to *involve* rather than *devolve* to achieve greater consistency and to ensure that all essential safety criteria are satisfied.
- 2.6 An early priority will be the overhaul of the system for completing risk assessments looking at: the format of assessments, the information and training to be provided, the implementation of safety measures identified and the review process.
- 2.7 My aim for risk assessments will not be to take away responsibility from those managing operational activities, but to provide a more hands-on service to those people, to assist them in the tasks of safety management and give greater confidence in the suitability and sufficiency of their own solutions to safety problems.

3 Key focus areas

3.1 Roles and responsibilities

- Leadership on a number of key safety issues is paramount to these matters receiving and maintaining their due importance.
- The SDNPA Health & Safety Policy sets out in Section 2 the key responsibilities for health and safety from the Members, the CEO through Directors and Managers to all staff. Assessing, auditing, assisting and reporting on the performance of these responsibilities, at all levels will be included in the Safety Adviser's feedback.
- Continuous development and improvement of the systems and documents, including the Health & Safety Policy, associated documents and committee arrangements to meet the needs of the organisation as simply and efficiently as possible, will be pursued. Wherever possible, to realise efficiencies of development and review, these documents will be consistent with those used at other National Parks.

3.2 Training and information

- A review of the current safety training arrangements has started, to ensure in the first place, that all essential training is provided and recorded. To be included is essential risk management training for all senior management and for a significant number of other staff who have key roles to play in either overseeing or developing and implementing operational safety management (including notably risk assessments).

- Further checks of all health and safety training will take place as part of ongoing audits and inspections, to ensure that suitable and sufficient provision is made and appropriately reviewed and revised.
- Wider information on the purpose and key principles of safety risk management and how this is provided for via existing structures and processes needs to be communicated across the organisation and available to all associated stakeholders.

4 Audit and inspection activity

4.1 To achieve further improvement in the operational management of occupational health and safety, to lessen the burden on other senior managers and to provide the necessary assurances to the Senior Management Team, the Safety Adviser will undertake a rolling programme of audits and inspections for all operational sites. Teams working 'in the field' will also be targeted. Using a 'standard' National Park format, a systematic and continuous assessment of operational safety management is proposed. Through these audits, opportunities will arise to enhance understanding of key health and safety issues, coach/mentor individual staff and consolidate good practice.

4.2 Workplace audits and inspections will (typically) take account of:

- Documentation – including: safety plans and risk assessments, incident reports/records, material safety data sheets (COSHH), equipment operating/maintenance instructions, training information etc
- Physical conditions – including: work space/light/noise/temperature/humidity/ventilation, access and egress, building structural condition, workstations and seating, waste disposal, fire arrangements
- Risk assessments – including: moving and handling, hazardous substances, any work requiring PPE, display screen equipment, equipment/plant/machinery, risks to pregnant workers, young persons and lone workers
- Resources and competencies – including: work involving moving and handling, work involving hazardous substances, work where a threat of ill-health exists, dangers associated with equipment/plant/machinery

Note: This list is meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive and will in practice be customised/added to by individual services/premises as appropriate

4.3 Reports on the findings of these routine audits and inspections will be made available to the appropriate line managers for information and action, as soon after the visits as possible. Summary reports of the programme of visits and findings will be made available to Senior Management Team at intervals to be agreed.

5 Fire risk assessments

5.1 Fire risk assessments are necessary for all workplaces. At present SDNPA staff are located in a range of locations, many owned or co-occupied by other organisations. Responsibility for carrying out fire risk assessments is shared with employers, occupiers and landlords. At present the Safety Adviser will only review, audit and subsequently report on fire risk assessments and associated precautions where action is necessary. An option exists for the Safety Adviser to carry out fire risk assessments in the future.

6 Future work programme

6.1 The rolling programme of audits and inspections referred to in this report and any follow-up action is expected to consume most of the time resource available for the Safety Adviser. Further work attending to matters identified through these visits including information and

training and assistance with risk assessments, will account for a substantial part of this time. Preparing and presenting reports (including to committees) on the findings of visits and on actions taken/in progress to address matters identified, will account for most remaining time.

- 6.2 Matters arising that are consistent with development needs at other National Parks will then be shared with those others, achieving greater efficiency in the use of resources. An early example of this is the management of exposure to vibrating tools/equipment which can lead to adverse health effects known as hand/arm vibration syndrome (HAVS). This matter is now being addressed jointly for all National Parks, being advised by me.
- 6.3 A more detailed future work programme will be developed for the first full annual report.