Health and Safety Executive Committee Annual Report, 2001

This Report covers the calendar year 2001, a year which has seen many changes in safety in response to both internal and external pressures.

1. *Legislation updates*

There have been few significant changes in health and safety legislation during 2001. The impact however of the Ionising Radiation Regulations 1999 (which came in during 2000) needs continuing reinforcement, which has been strengthened through the publication of the University policy on Management of Work with Ionising Radiation, and supported by improved training for those working with ionizing radiations.

The Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001 require the University to carry out risk assessments of likely radiation dose to the public for sealed sources which do not have special form certificates. This will impose some limited requirements on the University.

Similarly, the Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) Regulations 2000 prompted a series of inspections, and a central need for information and assurance about projects and areas involved with this work.

Work on compiling building risk assessments required under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 and the Fire Precautions (Workplace) (Amendment) Regulations, were commenced in 2001, by the Fire Safety Team.

2. *Health and Safety Executive and other enforcement agency*

Two inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) visited the University in July 2001 as immediate follow-up to an incident involving a silane pressure burst in the Department of Engineering. Discussions with the local inspector have occurred intermittently since then, and are continuing.

An inspector from the Employment Medical Advisory Service (EMAS) (the 'medical/health' wing of the Health and Safety Executive) visited the Department of Medicine in February to interview and follow up an accident in a Genetic Modification containment facility. A letter of recommendations was received from the inspector.

A complaint was forwarded to us by HSE containing allegations of poor environmental conditions, inadequate space, and poorly controlled manual handling tasks in UCLES. This was investigated and the findings reported back to the HSE, no further action being taken by HSE.

Formal correspondence was received informing us that we had satisfied our local inspector that we had complied with an Improvement Notice served on us in November 2000 relating to the management of work with ionizing radiation.

The final visit of the year was made by our local inspector following up a fatality in a stairwell in the Arts School. A letter was received from HSE suggesting actions which have now been taken.

Aside from these formal visits, there have been several less formal visits and discussions with HSE throughout the year. Thus, the University Safety Strategy document was discussed with our local inspector, the Director has kept the inspector informed of positive progress, and has invited him to attend events of significance, such as the Annual Safety Seminar and the DRPS (Departmental Radiation Protection Supervisors) Professional Updates.

3. *Safety policy*

Much of the work in this area during 2001 has centred on identifying policy in need of revision, and preparing short-form information leaflets on a variety of topics. The former fulfils the need to systematically review and update current policy, whilst the latter fulfils the immediate need to provide focused and relevant advice in a digestible format, whilst more extensive policy statements are revised. Subjects covered by leaflets range from Working Safely with VDUs to Electrical Safety, and feedback suggests this approach to information and advice is well received.

4. *Safety strategy*

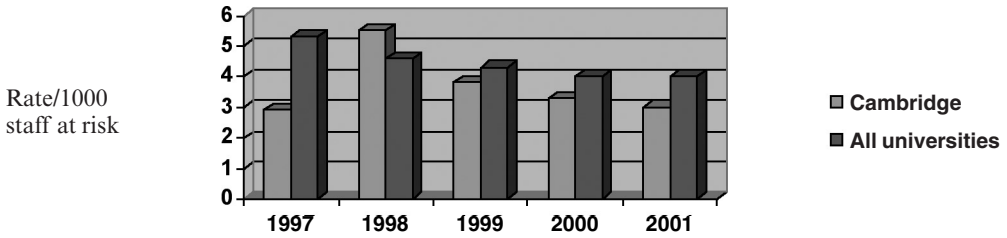
The 'Strategy for Safety Management' document produced in Spring 2001, is available on the website. The Health and Safety Executive Committee have received regular progress reports on achievement against target. It is pleasing to note that generally the progress has been satisfactory. All targets within the control of the Director of Health and Safety have been achieved.

5. *Accident and incident summary report*

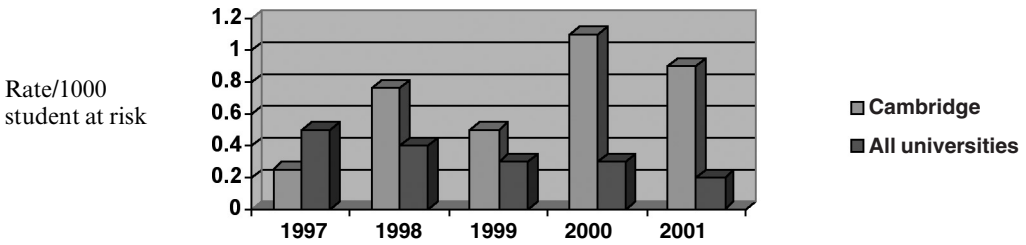
This section of the Report includes accident data presented in graphical format. The figures derive from the national database compiled annually by the Universities Safety Association, which allows year on year comparisons with other universities and type of accidents to be reviewed. Similar trends for reportable accident rates to both staff and students continued into 2001. There is a sustained downward trend in staff reportable accidents. However, for students, there is still a significantly higher rate of student accident reporting at Cambridge. This may reflect local interpretation of the reporting criteria and the cautious approach of encouraging students to seek hospital treatment which then necessitates official reporting to HSE, regardless of cause. In common with the national figure, slips, trips, and falls continue to be the single biggest injuring category: accidents at Cambridge accounted for almost 30% of totals, compared to the national statistic for universities of 33%.

There were two cases of reportable disease this year which contributed to the 39 cases reported overall from 94 universities. The national trend in this area is showing a steady increase, possibly because diagnosis is now more precise.

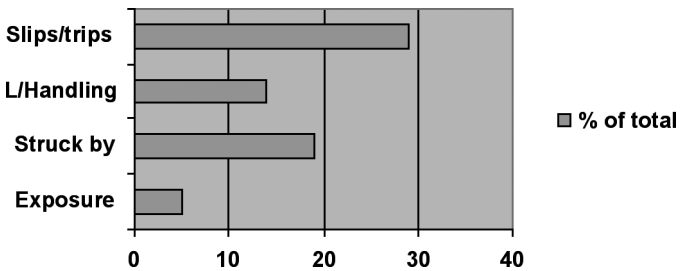
HSE Reportable Injuries – Staff



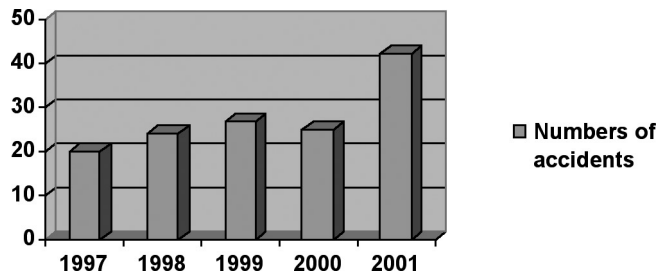
HSE Reportable Injuries – Students



Types of Accident



Major Injuring Accidents – Staff



6. *Safety auditing*

The proposal to adopt a nationally recognized safety auditing system was approved at the September meeting of the Health and Safety Executive Committee, and the draft versions of schedules and procedures were accepted at the December meeting. Training for senior staff of the Safety Office commenced in November 2001.

7. *Safety training*

Two significant areas of progress have been made in 2001: the recruitment of a Safety Education Officer and the preparation of an extensive programme which represents a major advance in the central provision of safety training services. In addition to this the Safety Office have continued to contribute to existing programmes such as the 'Induction and Safety' course, to provide basic training for several hundred new postgraduates, to deliver specialist courses, and to run tailor-made courses on request. 2001 also saw the start of basic core training courses for users of ionizing radiations and the delivery of the first Head of Department Safety Briefings. Feedback, especially for new courses, has been positive. Safety training and education represents an investment of several thousand man-hours.

Fire Safety Training has now been made more accessible thanks to the appointment of the new University Fire Safety Manager within the Estate Management and Building Service.

8. *Health issues*

From the enforcement viewpoint, the only item of significance was the visit of an Inspector from EMAS (see paragraph 2, section 2). However, the Occupational Health Service continues to see all cases of possible work-related ill health. 'Clusters' of such cases have also been investigated by the Safety Office, particularly where there are suggestions of ill health aggravated by poor working conditions.

A systematic review of biological services facilities commenced in 2001 and revealed a number of concerns, principally related to the procedures for controlling allergen exposure, and which need input from the Occupational Health Service.

9. *The Safety Office*

The Safety Office has grown in number and strength, and is now able to offer an extended range of specialist advice thus covering both the breadth and depth of safety expertise required. The new team began during 2001 to make significant advances in building effective working relationships at all levels throughout the University. Increased 'visibility' within Departments has strongly reinforced the message of a responsive staff who are knowledgeable, approachable, and helpful. At the end of 2001, the Office comprised eight Officer staff with an impressive range of expertise, supported by technical, clerical, and secretarial staff. However, this increase in number does not of course mean that the responsibility for safety management is shifted, but rather that the Safety Office has the flexibility to devote more resources to educating others in how to manage safety.

10. *End note*

To end on a high note, the following comments from safety education courses given during 2001, show the positive direction in which safety is moving.

'Overall very interesting and enjoyable'	A new postgraduate, on day 1 of the seminar
'… good, informative, concise, and reassuring. Excellent for new users'	An attendee of radioisotope core training
'De-mystified the process of risk assessment'	An attendee of a customized training course