

Civil Service Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme

General Council Report 1494

(Meeting/s of 14 December 2005, 26 September 2007, 12 December 2007)

Claim that the Official Side establish a voluntary health monitoring programme for all laboratory staff working in the State Laboratories

The Official Side and the Staff Side met on 13 June 2007 in the Department of Finance to discuss the Staff Side claim "that the Official Side establish a voluntary health monitoring programme for all laboratory staff working in State Laboratories".

1. At the outset, the Official Side gave background information on the claim and on health monitoring in the Civil Service.
2. The Official Side and the Staff Side then provided further details with regard to health monitoring in respect of their areas.
3. The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) provided an update on categories of workplace hazards under the generic categorisations Psychological, Biological, Chemical and Physical. The CMO (who is a member of the National Immunisation Committee) then gave a summary of the programmes his Office had put in place in Government laboratories over the last 5/6 years i.e.
 - *Department of Agriculture & Food*: TB immunisation in 5/6 Regional Veterinary laboratories and TB Reactor Meat Plants; Audiology tests in Meat Plants; vaccination against Avian Influenza/provision of Tamiflu for flu emergency workers; rabies/tetanus prevention programme.
 - *State Laboratory & the Forensic Science Laboratory*: Hepatitis B vaccination and Lead Exposure measurement.

The CMO presented to the Staff Side copies of *Guide to Health Screening in the Workplace* which was prepared by his Office in 2006. He then gave a summary of the guidelines focusing on the types of screening (i.e. laboratory tests/lifestyle), principles of health screening, advantages and disadvantages of screening. He outlined that any workplace screening undertaken should have a scientific and medical evidence base, and that inappropriate health screening can be of no value and can sometimes even be hazardous to health. This issue is discussed in the CMO's Office publication *Guide to*

Health Screening in the Workplace.

4. IMPACT reported on their concerns in relation to the level of health monitoring in laboratories particularly as regards ensuring that the working environment of staff was safe. The main concern of staff was the cumulative effect of unknown substances that they were using/testing. IMPACT also identified issues in relation to risk assessments particularly as to where risks were identified, what carcinogens were being used/available and their monitoring.

5. The State Laboratory supplied detailed information on their risk assessment of chemicals and procedures, information on their air-change system, role and training of their Safety Officers, and their procedures for maintaining material data sheets.

Forensic Science Laboratory also gave an update on their current position on environmental monitoring, material data sheets and liaison with the Office of the CMO.

6. It was agreed by all sides that:

- The Health and Safety function is very well developed in some laboratories with robust safety systems in place
- The norm outside the civil service is that persons working in health and safety sections (especially the head of function) have, or are in the process of acquiring a qualification in the area i.e. Diploma in Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (provided by UCD). The role and training of civil servants working in some health and safety areas should be reviewed, with a view to establishing best practice in these areas
- Appropriate health screening is the responsibility of each laboratory in the light of the safety issues identified in each laboratory
- Risk Assessment should be properly resourced. If there is a concern about chemical(s) or other substances used in laboratories, the relevant material data sheet(s) should be consulted. These outline any potential health hazards, and whether environmental monitoring (e.g. air concentrations of a substance) and/or health surveillance of individuals (e.g. blood levels of a substance) are required. This task is the responsibility of health & safety sections
- Copies of all Official Side publications/reports on health screening/monitoring should in future be sent to the Staff Side and communicated to staff
- Any health screening to be undertaken should have a scientific and medical basis
- The Official Side and the Staff Side will work together in relation to health monitoring. It was decided that meetings of the group comprising

representatives of laboratories, the staff panel, and the Department of Finance would take place on a regular basis to exchange information/ideas.

This report, recording agreement, was adopted on 12 December 2007.

Aengus O Riain
Official Side Secretary

Joan Byrne
Staff Side Secretary

Agreed Report recording agreement

This report was adopted on 12 December 2007