

Report of the Head of Nature Recovery

Subject: Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) – Update Report

Introduction

This report provides a brief update on the Authority's work to improve the management of Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) with a specific focus on the work of the Countryside Management Team.

This report follows on from the more comprehensive update report provided by the Director of Nature and Tourism at the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee meetings held on the 12th July 2023 and on 8th November 2023.

Background

The Park Authority received a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Improvement Notice in December 2022 (which has since been withdrawn as the Authority has fully complied with the notice) which placed a condition on the Authority to either:

1. Ensure that the risk from vibration to our employees is eliminated at source.
2. Where it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk at source, and an exposure action value (EAV¹) is likely to be reached or exceeded, then exposure shall be reduced to as low a level as is reasonably practicable by establishing and implementing a programme of organisational and technical measures.

As highlighted via the last update reports, the Authority has responded by attempting to achieve both of the above outcomes but, due to the nature of our work, by predominantly implementing a detailed suite of actions to reduce hand-arm vibration to as low as is reasonably practicable.

Plan of Action

A HAVS Plan of Action has been provided previously, this was the key document in the Authority's management of HAVS related matters following the HSE improvement notice. All actions are now completed, with ongoing actions referring to monitoring and review of control measures within the Risk Assessment, and operational matters.

Monitoring is undertaken as part of ongoing operational processes. Engagement has been undertaken with staff throughout the year and staff are encouraged and supported to provide feedback as part of their working routine.

¹ The exposure action value (EAV) is a daily amount of vibration exposure above which employers are required to take action to control exposure. The greater the exposure level, the greater the risk and the more action employers will need to take to reduce the risk.

Since then, the key focus was to capture data over the winter period, as the nature of the practical work changes (i.e. less grass cutting). This was in order to ensure that we have a year-round picture of our management of HAVS. This will provide more detailed data to help inform key business decisions (such as investment in equipment, training, systems, staffing, etc) longer-term.

Progress update

More comprehensive reports were presented to the Audit and Corporate Services Committee in March, July and November 2023. Consequently, the section below highlights some of the most significant actions since the last report to maintain progress.

Baseline Vibration Assessment (equipment) – As reported previously, all summer equipment has been tested. This involved an independent company undertaking an assessment of equipment to ascertain the vibration magnitude of each tool type. This information was then used to calculate and provide accurate HAVS exposure limits. Tools more commonly used in the winter have also been tested, and all tools have a vibration rating and staff have been provided with a comprehensive list highlighting exposure points per hour for the tools ensuring they don't exceed their daily exposure limit.

Specific staff were trained to undertake the testing of equipment and have been and have continued to test equipment as necessary. Further staff will also be trained to build resilience for these skills within the teams.

Investment in new equipment – the vibration assessment of the equipment used by staff has resulted in some equipment being decommissioned (due to vibration levels, including brushcutters, petrol drills, clearing and pole saws, hedgetrimmers, and other equipment) as well as the Authority embarking on a significant programme of investment in new and more up-to-date tools and machinery (i.e. with lower vibration scores). Of note is the substantial investment in new brush cutters (£8K) as well as high-tech remote-controlled mowers which are also used for conservation cutting, and more recently electric equipment with lower vibration scores (particularly in comparison to petrol equivalents) and which also contribute towards the Authority's carbon reduction agenda (£176k and £24k – funded via Local Places for Nature). This includes equipment for wardens, rangers and volunteers.

Extensive training programme – as reported previously a comprehensive series of training events took place with staff across the Countryside Management team last year to ensure that all Wardens are fully up to date with best practice in terms of minimising and managing exposure to HAVS. Annual refresher training will be undertaken and new starters will also undergo HAVS awareness training. As stated above, further training will be undertaken for wardens to ensure resilience amongst the teams to undertake the vibration measurements.

Monitoring and compliance – daily and weekly logs of vibration are recorded for all staff using vibrating equipment and checks are undertaken to ensure compliance with the Authority's approach to HAVS management; no issues were identified. Any 'near misses' (such as staff exceeding vibration limits) will be investigated and, if necessary,

potential disciplinary action may be taken to ensure everyone’s long-term safety with regards to HAVS. Annual health surveillance of staff for HAVS has taken place.

Options are currently being considered for the ongoing monitoring of HAVS, with a system which uses R-Link technology, whereby a monitor attaches to the equipment and a wrist worn device is used to monitor the vibration. The advantages of this system include accurate real time data, rather than estimates, is easier to use, and will not be as intensive in terms of administration and additionally can be set to automatically inform line managers of exceedance of points limits. Further information on this will be reported in due course.

Rights of Way Management

One of the issues discussed at the Audit and Corporate Services Committee last year was the potential impact on productivity and quality standards, particularly in terms of vegetation management along public paths, due to the adoption of a significantly lower HAVS vibration target for staff.

The Authority has adopted a hierarchy of cutting which aims to balance the safety of users, the popularity of key routes and the need to keep the public rights of way (PROW) network as ‘open and accessible’ as possible whilst limiting staff exposure to HAVS.

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| <p>Cutting hierarchy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Coast Path2. Links to the Coast Path3. Honey pots / Community Paths, Visitor Centres, Car Parks and Access Paths to Beaches.4. Inland Areas |
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Changing to a new way of working for the cutting season across the year proved challenging but as reported previously, there was no significant change in the level of complaints received over the summer (i.e. complaints remained extremely low in-line with previous years) or winter. However, it is worth noting that the prolonged wet and windy weather this winter has had a significant impact on the ability of teams to access land and undertake some of their work programme. For example, this has affected gate replacements on the coast path across the areas due to waterlogged field access. There are also delays to planned diversion and reprofiling work. This may have an impact on work programmes over the summer season.

Conclusion

The health, safety and well-being of staff, volunteers and visitors remains the Authority’s highest priority. However, the HSE Improvement Notice was a timely reminder that the Authority’s policies, procedures and working practices need regular review and adjustment in order to meet contemporary needs.

It is testament to a wide range of staff across the Authority, but especially the Countryside Management Team, that the HSE confirmed on the 31st March 2023 that the evidence submitted by the Authority satisfied the requirements of the Improvement

Notice and that the case was duly closed. The HSE also thanked the Authority for “*dealing with this matter promptly and in such a thorough manner.*”

Continued activity, including in terms of reporting, is mainstreamed within the Authority’s wider corporate approach to managing Health and Safety (i.e. via the internal Health and Safety Group), and will continue to be monitored and reported as part of this process, as well as on an ongoing operational basis.

Background Documents

Report 30/23 Director of Nature & Tourism – HAVS Update Report (Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee 08/11/23)

Report 18/23 Director of Nature & Tourism – HAVS Update Report (Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee 12/07/23)

Report 08/23 Health & Safety Group – Hand Arm Vibration (HAV) (Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee 01/03/23)

Author: Michelle Webber – Head of Nature Recovery

Consultees: James Parkin – Director of Nature and Tourism, Area Countryside Managers, Health and Safety Project Manager.