

SAFETY

Safety issues – can you help?

The Safeguards in Science Committee is looking for information from members on several items which have recently been a focus for discussion. If you can help, then write to the Safeguards in Science Committee at ASE Headquarters or fax or e-mail John Lawrence (fax 01707-266532; e-mail johnlawrence@ase.org.uk).

Teaching science to pupils with SEN – health and safety issues

The Committee is looking for examples of practical steps which science teachers have taken in the lab to minimise the health and safety risks posed by teaching science to pupils with special educational needs. We wish to develop our advice for teachers, by drawing on examples and case studies of strategies which work and those which teachers have tried but which were not particularly successful.

In his article in March 2000 *SSR* (*SSR* Vol. 81, No. 296, March 2000, pages 37-40), Peter Borrowes suggested a number of risk control measures

International use of ASE safety materials

The Safeguards in Science Committee has recently noted the adaptation and translation of two of its most popular titles, *Be Safe!* and *Safeguards in the School Laboratory*.

The first is a Polish translation of the latest edition of *Safeguards in the School Laboratory*, with the title *VARNO DELO V SOLSKEM LABORATORIJU*, and the Science Teachers' Association of Ontario has published *Be Safe! A health and safety reference for science and technology curriculum* for both Ontario and Quebec. It is gratifying to note the high regard ASE's safety publications have internationally.

which teachers could try. These include giving pupils with impaired vision or poor co-ordination of motor skills face shields rather than safety spectacles; using plastic aprons with pupils in wheelchairs; having an extra member of staff present for a particular part of a lesson; team teaching; selective exclusion of a pupil with behavioural difficulties during the practical part of a lesson, etc.

We believe these and other strategies are being used by teachers in both mainstream and special schools, in order to retain practical work but minimise the risks. If you are such a teacher, then we would like to hear from you. We do not need an extensive report, simply a description of the class you were teaching; the special needs you were dealing with; what you did; how successful it was; and whether you would use it again. The Committee will be grateful to receive any responses because our advice carries more weight if it is founded in classroom practice.

Out-of-court settlements following accidents in science lessons

From time to time we hear of accidents where science teachers are being threatened, or believe they might be, with court action because of allegedly inadequate health and safety practice. Although such incidents are rare, even rarer is the likelihood of the case actually getting to court, and usually after some initial correspondence we hear no more.

We believe that the lack of correspondence means that the allegations are dropped or alternatively some out-of-court settlement arrangement has been reached. Having no idea about the extent of such arrangements, we are seeking help from ASE members. Our interest is in the number of cases where a lapse in safety is alleged but disputed by the teacher, department or school concerned. Despite this, the employer has settled out of court giving the teacher or school no opportunity to defend their position. Employers do this because it is cheaper for the employer's insurance to pay something,

rather than risk the certainty of expensive lawyer's fees and the possibility (however remote) of considerable damages. This leaves teachers feeling guilty, even where the case against them would have been weak. Have you been involved in a case like this or do you know personally of such a case? If so, please let us know. All information will be treated in confidence.

We have never heard of a situation where a science technician was threatened with court action over health and safety, but if you do know of such an incident then tell us please.

Teacher and technician health and safety INSET courses

Our final request is for your views on any health and safety INSET courses you have attended. Between them, ASE, CLEAPSS and SSERC provide a substantial proportion of science health and safety INSET for teachers and technicians. Other organisations or individuals also provide such courses and from time to time we hear about them or see materials which they use. Occasionally this raises concerns in our minds, which centre on either the extent to which the presenters understand the nature of science in schools or their approach, which can seem unduly threatening.

If you have attended any such course then let us know whether you felt it met your needs, was authoritative, and left you feeling more or less secure about health and safety in your department. We would be pleased to know who organised the course, who presented it and roughly when this was. We are hoping to identify those courses or providers who offer good quality training and those who do not. Feel free, of course, to comment on any ASE, CLEAPSS or SSERC courses, although the aim of the survey is to find out about other providers.

Do please respond to these issues, if you are able. The Safeguards in Committee will value your contribution to its discussions.