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Health & Safety Executive

Via email

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to make a complaint regarding the protection of UNISON members working for the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and its contractor, Eville & Jones (E&J). Since the Covid-19 pandemic began, UNISON has held weekly conference calls with the FSA seeking assurances about social distancing and the provision of the right PPE for Meat Hygiene Inspectors (MHI) and Official Veterinarians (OV) working in one or more slaughterhouses and/or meat production/cutting plants in England and Wales.

Despite raising these concerns, the FSA has failed to address the issue of legally required risk assessments in each workplace.

- **UNISON** has said to the FSA that:
 - The FSA should carry out individual plant visits and complete a thorough plant specific risk assessment to ensure a safe working environment for staff
 - UNISON does not agree with generic risk assessment having scored a low risk rating for plant-based staff
 - UNISON has highlighted its disapproval on how individual plants haven't been risked assessed regarding social distancing and health and safety
 - UNISON feels that the hands-off approach taken by the FSA is putting members at risk of contracting Covid-19
 - There are five confirmed cases of Covid-19 from FSA staff working in premises in the Field Operations division and one for Eville & Jones staff, contracted by the FSA.

- **UNISON** has asked the FSA to:
 - **Allow** the 6 health and safety leads across England and Wales to visit and observe and verify that social distancing is happening in all meat plants. The FSA say this is unnecessary travel even though it is classified as a low risk activity
 - **Provide** copies of all FSA risk assessments for each meat plant. We would expect the FBO do a risk assessment that FSA/E&J staff can see

- **To collate** the number of plants across the country where MHIs and OVs are working regarding social distancing not only for our members but for FBO workers as well. Then to report these plants to the HSE if the food business is failing

The FSA National Health & Safety Committee – where UNISON H&S reps sit along with the FSA – met on the 6 May 2020. I've attached the minutes of that meeting to demonstrate that UNISON has tried every avenue to seek the protection of our members. The generic risk assessment covers hundreds of workplaces.

Employers must do a risk assessment

There are existing laws which already protect workers. It's a legal requirement, under the Health and Safety at Work Regulations Act 1974 (The Act), for employers to carry out a workplace risk assessment. Employers must also take the actions that come from their risk assessment.

These will include enabling working from home where possible, ensuring good hygiene and cleanliness, and making sure workers can be at least two metres apart at all times. Where these actions don't mitigate the risk, workers may need personal protective equipment.

Our Field Operations member' – who are considered key workers in the Pandemic – have no choice but to go into work. UNISON expects the FSA to protect its workforce and contractors. We believe the duty of care has not met nor satisfied under the Health & Safety at Work Regulations Act 1974. The generic risk assessment written by the FSA does not adequately cover the risk and the FSA has so far refused to provide the risk assessments from local FSA managers.

UNISON has been raising the issue of risk assessments since the end of March 2020. This week we received the spreadsheets which are a desktop exercise and not a proper risk assessment. We also received the new risk assessments by species, which the FSA's Health & Safety Unit collated. However, the FSA is still not following The Act by working with the recognised trade union, local management and the premises managers or owners. I attach the old spreadsheets and the new by species risk assessments.

Therefore, UNISON would faithfully request that the Health & Safety Executive urgently investigate the FSA for potential breaches to The Act in order that our members are protected as the key workers necessary for the food supplies of the country.

Best wishes,



Paul Bell
National Officer
Local Government, Police & Justice