

The Thinking Woman's Railway
Centre of the Campaign for Real Railways
Home of the Camping Vans, TOAD & TADPOLE

Telephone:- Christow (01647) 253108
Telegraphic:- Christow@teignrail.co.uk
Internet:- www.TEIGNRAIL.Com.

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Alison Hernandez,
Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly,
Andy Hocking House,
Alderson Drive,
Exeter
EX2 7RP

RAILWAY RECONSTRUCTION

Dear Ms. Hernandez,

Drink-Driving: Still a Laughing Matter

Thank you for your letter of 3rd September.

As you may imagine, I disagree fundamentally with your position and have made clear why I do so in a continuation of my web-page article with the above title.

More and more people tell me about the discipline of their workplaces. If individuals do not reveal what their firms enforce with regard to alcohol, I ask them and invariably I am told that employees must be free of alcohol when on duty; this applies increasingly to roles which are not safety critical.

An exercise you could do to prove my point would be to pop down to Sowton Trading Estate one afternoon and ask to enter a factory or warehouse. Then I suggest that you find some chaps working on the floor and say to them, devilishly: "The forklift driver's downed a couple of pints at lunchtime. You're happy with him working around you, knowing that he's not as sharp as he was earlier?"

This is of course silly on two counts: you would not find a modern workplace where a forklift driver could get away with having a drink; and we both know what explicit answer would come from the people on the ground.

So, if this is the discipline that prevails in the closed and controlled environment of industrial premises, why do we still allow drivers who have consumed alcohol to be out on the vast extent of the road network, among the general public of all ages and abilities, in all conditions of weather and light?

With you obviously being a determined woman, unlikely to be moved by references to transport history and politics, I had not intended to write again on the same subject. But then a circular came over the wires from the Rail Safety and Standards Board which has led to my arm being strengthened somewhat.

Under the heading "Rail Industry Road Risk Resource Centre" in this week's bulletin is a link to Highways England's "Driving for Better Business."

One of the resources available is "Example Policies," copies of internal manuals six major organizations have agreed to share. Five of

the six state that their staff should absolutely not be under the influence of alcohol while at work. One, strangely, makes no mention that I can find of alcohol. One of the five is uncompromising:

"Drivers must be alcohol free. Being within the drink-drive limit for the location, although legally compliant, is not tolerated by McLaren, because even a small amount of alcohol can significantly impair ability to drive safely."

In its own guidance, "Management Toolkit," *Driving for Better Business* draws upon the best practice to suggest wording which may be included in firms' road safety codes. The "Drugs and Alcohol" section contains:

- Ban lunchtime drinking for all staff who may be required to undertake any safety critical function, including driving.
- Apply a zero-tolerance policy for alcohol in your company; alcohol can even impair a driver who is under the legal limit ...

Laudably, I read that you have signed up, or intend to sign up, your force and your office to this very welcome initiative.

Now, I realize that there is much more to *Driving for Better Business* than the matter I am concentrating upon, but in the drafting of your policy you will have to rule on drinking and driving while at work by civilian police staff and your people; I am taking it that there will be no need to instruct police officers as adequate standards must already be in place.

In your quest to "lead by example," you will I am sure want to publicize your new policy, so I feel free to ask you whether you will be adopting Highways England's or McLaren's clauses, or coming up with some less stringent wording.

And if you do take the hard line, will you still shrink from campaigning to extend the prohibition to the motorist at large?

In future, your *Wikipedia* entry may record:

The crowning achievement of Alison Hernandez's tenure as Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall was her success in lobbying government to reduce the permitted blood-alcohol limit for motorists, bringing England and Wales into line with much of the world and effectively ruling out drinking and driving. Thanks to her, a great many people are alive today who would have died had the previous limit, unaltered since 1965, not been changed.

If you do not press for this rightful measure, then you can be sure that others will. Personally, I would like to see you take the credit.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Burges

Encl.