



Work and Pensions Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 8976 Email workpencom@parliament.uk

From the Chair

Sarah Albon
Chief Executive
Health and Safety Executive

24 March 2021

Dear Sarah,

I am writing to you following allegations about occupational health risks at the Preston New Road fracking site, which is currently non-operational. A report by Dr Barbara Kneale and Dennis May alleges that serious health and safety breaches took place at the site, including workers being exposed to dust containing Respirable Crystalline Silica (RCS), a carcinogen.

According to the report, HSE had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Environment Agency which stated that they would conduct a joint inspection of the key operations for new and first-time shale gas operators. The report claims that, despite this, HSE did not carry out any inspections of the site during operations. It would be helpful to have answers to the following questions:

- 1. What was HSE's understanding of the requirements imposed on it by the MoU, including any requirement to undertake inspections?**
 - a. The report alleges that HSE "did not carry out any inspections during fracking operations at Cuadrilla's Preston New Road site". Is this correct, and if not, how many times did HSE inspect the site during fracking operations?**
 - b. If so, why did HSE not carry out any inspections during fracking operations?**

- 2. The Memorandum of Understanding states that HSE and the Environment Agency would carry out a joint inspection for new and first-time shale gas operators. Did HSE carry out a joint inspection of the Preston New Road site when operations began there in 2012? If not, why not?**

- 3. The report states that there was "no attention paid to the management of silica sand and related exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica" at the site. Does HSE accept this finding?**



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- a. What consideration did HSE give to the potential risks of RCS at the time?
 - b. According to an email from a member of HSE staff included in the report, HSE did not review the risks of RCS at the site. The member of staff describes this approach as being appropriate because HSE has “finite resources” and RCS does not have “major accident hazard potential”. Following this report, and notwithstanding the fact that the site is currently non-operational, does HSE plan to review its approach to reviewing the risks of RCS at similar sites?
4. What consideration has HSE given to the risks that workers who were exposed to RCS at the Preston New Road site may have faced?

It would be helpful to have a response by Thursday 8 April.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Chair, Work and Pensions Committee