

Keeping you informed

One thing is certain in the recession: don't cut health and safety corners

To back up its message to employers not to cut health and safety corners in the recession, and coincide with the launch of its new strategy for health and safety in Great Britain, the HSE has been working with outside experts to monitor the economic downturn and assess its impact on health and safety.

The Executive's economists have analysed evidence from previous recessions, which shows that injury rates fall during periods of reduced economic activity, mainly because there are fewer newly-hired workers, less long-hours working, and, perhaps, fewer incentives for workers to report minor incidents and injuries.

However, there is also evidence that 'corner-cutting' in times of recession can lead to increasing rates of injury – possibly due to cut-backs on investment in training, and maintenance of equipment. On balance, though, the HSE found that in past recessions, the former effect has outweighed the latter – particularly in the construction and manufacturing sectors.

Much less evidence is available regarding work-related ill health, and there tends to be different patterns for different health conditions. Also, the incidence of non work-related conditions that can also be caused by work, such as stress, could rise because of the link between unemployment/deprivation and general ill health.

As for the current situation, while it is still too early to assess any real impact on health and safety, sectoral effects are already evident. Year-on-year falls in construction and manufacturing would be expected to result in a reduction in overall injury rates due to the effect of a shift in the composition of the economy away from sectors with relatively high injury rates. Different groups of workers are also being affected, with more men becoming unemployed than women, and more young people than other age groups.

When it comes to employers' responses to the downturn, the picture is mixed. Different surveys carried out to date revealed that many workers were becoming more fearful of raising health and safety concerns now, while some company directors have said they would cut bonuses rather than health and safety spending.

Speaking at the launch of the new strategy, HSE chair Judith Hackitt said that while the temptation to cut corners is real, any cutbacks "will hit the bottom line sooner or later". TUC general secretary Brendan Barber agreed, saying work to improve health and safety is more important now than ever. He added: "It will also be important as we come out of recession, when hopefully new businesses will grow and bring in new people. It's up to all of us to make sure those people come into a safe job."

IOSH (Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) Managing Safely Course

Duration 4 Days (day release every Tuesday from 18th August 2009 – 8th September 2009)

Places are available for the above course being held at our offices in Denton, Greater Manchester

This is a cost effective method of training line managers and supervisors in how to manage company safety systems and introduce new controls or changes when required. Numbers are limited, so if you would like to attend, please contact us on 0161 320 2024 for further details.

Why choose us

All of our trainers are fully accredited and we tightly limit numbers to ensure delegates receive personal attention.

Our courses always receive excellent feedback and we are justifiably proud of consistently high results achieved by our students.

BREAKING NEWS

In Court

Waste firm fined £190k after scavenger fatality

A recycling company has been fined £190,000 following the death of a self-employed worker at a rubbish dump in Hampshire.

Charlie Smith had been contacted by Biffa Waste Services Ltd to remove potentially valuable items from a refuge inside a shed at the firm's reclamation site in Eversely. He was carrying out this process with his son when the accident took place on 2 February 2006.

While Mr Smith was sifting through the rubbish an employee at the site was transporting plastic and cardboard on to a conveyer belt, using a mechanical shovel loader. Once the contents were loaded on to the belt they were taken to a manual sorting area.

The aisle running between the piles of rubbish and the conveyer belt was very narrow, which meant that the shovel loader was unable to turn around once it reached the belt. Consequently, the vehicle had to reverse in order to get back to the refuge.

On one occasion, while the loader was reversing, the driver felt a bump but did not stop the vehicle as he had felt multiple bumps throughout previous journeys. As he continued to reverse, however he noticed that he had run over Mr Smith. An ambulance was called and Mr Smith was taken to hospital where he was treated for crush injuries to his pelvis. His injuries were so severe, however, that he died three days later.

Biffa Waste Services Ltd appeared at Winchester Crown Court on 29 May and pleaded guilty to breaching s3(1) of the HSWA 1974. It was fined £190,000 and ordered to pay £50,000 in costs.

In mitigation, the firm entered an early guilty plea and said that it had no previous similar convictions. Following the incident it has now banned scavenging from being allowed on the site. It has also introduced pedestrian-free zones, on other sites, where there are moving vehicles.

HSE inspector, Nina Judkins, said: "This was an extremely serious incident resulting in the tragic death of a man. This incident could have been avoided if the working practices had separated moving vehicles from people on foot. Companies need to carefully assess tasks, such as sorting waste by hand, to make sure no one is at risk of being hit by a vehicle."

"HSE inspectors will be carrying out an inspection initiative focusing on the waste industry this year. We will be looking at skip-hire activities and commercial collections in high-street locations. When visiting skip-hire companies we will be particularly looking at arrangements for reducing the risk of pedestrians (including totters) being struck by vehicles."

If you're not yet a client of Safety2Business you can still speak to a member of our team who will provide you with information and guidance on 0161 320 2020 or send us an email to hello@safety2business.com

Keeping you informed

Occupational Health Matters

Health & Safety and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

DDA Act- aims to eliminate discrimination against disabled people, and imposes a duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments.

Fulfilling your responsibilities under the Act in relation to H&S can be a complex matter. Situations may arise where employers have concerns regarding meeting their statutory duties under H&S Law if they employ a disabled person in a particular job role. However if you refuse to employ/retain a disabled person and reasons are UN-substantiated then it may lead to you being taken to a tribunal under the DDA.

To meet your obligations under both H&S and the DDA you would be advised to:-

- Make an individual, objective and competent assessment, of the risk associate with employment of a disabled person. (Your H&S consultant can facilitate with this).
- Implement or consider "Reasonable Adjustments" which might reduce or remove the risk.
- Do all that is "Reasonably practicable" to remove the risk in the case of disabled persons already employed.
- Deal reasonably with any cases involving residual risk.

Decisions regarding employability are not a medical responsibility. Medical staff assess the risk, advise if the DDA is likely to apply and present you with advice pertaining to possible adjustments. The employer must then decide on the acceptability of the risks in compliance with the DDA, Health & Safety and Employment Law.

Despite adjustments, the employment of a disabled person may still present H&S risks to the individual or others. Unacceptable risks properly assessed as such under H&S Law will be justification for dismissal under the DDA.

Justifying ACCEPTABLE and UNACCEPTABLE is a complex area. As an employer you are required to justify the decisions! There is significant benefit in obtaining the services of Specialist Occupational Health Practitioners who will be able to undertake full medical assessments and advise you on what level of risk is acceptable, and support you through the management process of implementing adjustments.

For more information on the planned changes please use the
Ask the expert facility on the Safety2Business Website.

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