



Protect employees from workplace accidents: setting the standard for health and safety

There has been a substantial reduction in work-related injury rates and numbers in the UK since 1974.¹ But with the recent economic downturn resulting in steady reductions of staff, loss of skills and overworking, organisations should be more anxious than ever to avoid workplace accidents by ensuring that employees are trained with appropriate qualifications.

Before the introduction of the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act in April 2008, it proved very difficult to prosecute large organisations. The Act seeks to address this by focusing on the way in which a company's activities are managed or organised, and it is not reliant on one individual being found guilty of gross negligence manslaughter. The courts are now able to consider the wider corporate picture, looking collectively at the actions, or more appropriately the failings, of the company's senior management. The Act has a clear message – directors and individuals with managerial responsibility need to ensure that health and safety risks are properly managed and resourced in the organisations that they run.

Awareness of the implications of the revised Corporate Manslaughter Act is particularly important for multinational businesses, which have to contend with differing legal frameworks across national borders. The CIEH has seen a strong increase in demand for health and safety qualifications from overseas firms in recent years, with interest from sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture particularly pronounced.

Managing health and safety should not be seen as a regulatory burden though; it also offers many financial benefits. Big businesses invest a lot in good health and safety practices. As well as training all employees in the basics of health and safety, they often employ dedicated health and safety specialists who are responsible for meeting stringent targets, such as reducing workplace accidents and employee absence rates. Large businesses realise that as well as potential cost savings, health and safety improves their reputation for corporate responsibility among investors, customers and communities, which in turn protects long term stock value.

Whilst it is not appropriate for all businesses to employ this level of expertise, good health and safety supports small companies to meet their business objectives. If a staff member is absent, this is more acutely felt in small businesses because there is a knock on effect as lack of flexibility to replace the employee impacts overall productivity. If the absence is work-related and therefore avoidable, the investment in health and safety can be justified.

It is also important to ensure that employees with different learning capabilities, those from different backgrounds and those that might not speak English as their first language, are able to benefit from training in health and safety. For example, the CIEH has observed an especially strong market over the past twelve months for Arabic language qualifications. By offering qualifications in a variety of languages, we can ensure a greater number of the workforce is provided with the option to take these qualifications.

There is an increasing need for businesses to take into account the possible dangers of not implementing the right health safety strategy. The financial costs resulting from poorly trained staff,

¹ <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/history/index.htm>

and the accidents that can follow, are far greater than the costs involved in investing in recognised qualifications. It is essential to ensure that all staff employees are aware of their personal responsibility when it comes to health and safety.