September 2014

HSE Safety Cornerstones Newsletter

A newsletter of practical compliance and safety tips provided by Packetts

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Effective Leadership Actions That Help Manage Health and Safety

Ensuring health and safety in the workplace is a team effort—one that is made easier as more people become engaged. But as a recognised leader in your organisation, you have more responsibility than others.

You are a decision-maker tasked with ensuring organisation-wide adherence to company policies, and that includes health and safety. Without the overarching guidance from you and your fellow decision-makers, your organisation risks falling apart at the seams. Undeniably, many recent high-profile safety cases are rooted in negligent leadership.

Under UK law, employers and directors can be held personally liable for failing to fulfil their duties of ensuring workplace health and safety. By taking these simple steps, you can lessen your liability and help guarantee your employees' safety.

- **Write an organisation-wide health and safety policy**. You and your fellow leaders should chart the course for effective health and safety management—do this by writing a health and safety policy that acknowledges all of the organisation's significant risks. The policy should assign responsibilities, ensure leaders understand the key issues involved and outline how to communicate health and safety issues.
- **Deliver health and safety through effective management**. Delivering health and safety depends on effective management—by implementing robust management systems, you can help guarantee that risks are dealt with sensibly. Disseminate competent health and safety advice, carry out risk assessments and involve employees in decisions that affect their health and safety.
- **Monitor health and safety at all times**. Monitoring and reporting are vital to establishing a consistent health and safety culture in the workplace. Your management systems should allow for both specific, incident-generated reports in addition to routine assessments. Be sure to conduct periodic audits of your management structures, the impact on health and safety from changes such as new procedures, and your strategies for tweaking procedures due to legislative developments.
- **Review health and safety throughout the year**. A yearly, high-level review of health and safety performance is essential to your organisation's survival. It helps you discern whether appropriate health and safety measures have been adopted across the company. Your review process should examine whether the health and safety policy reflects your organisation's current needs, the effectiveness of health and safety reporting, and any health and safety shortcomings and strategies for fixing them.

You and your fellow leaders' actions set the tone for the entire organisation. By modelling a serious devotion to workplace health and safety, you can help reduce accidents and illnesses and consequently lower operating costs. Trust the insurance professionals at Packetts for comprehensive health and safety guidance.

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The Benefits of Involving Employees in Health and Safety Decisions

You are required by law to consult with your employees on health and safety matters in the workplace. But involving your employees in health and safety decisions can be more than just a simple government mandate completed for the sake of compliance—it actually comes with untold benefits.

Talking, listening and cooperating with employees when making health and safety decisions helps reduce accidents, improve overall efficiency and identify solutions to problems.

Indeed, the numbers bear witness: accident rates are lower—around 14 per cent—when employees genuinely feel they have a say in health and safety matters, compared to workplaces where employees do not get involved (26 per cent), according to the HSE.

Employee involvement in health and safety planning helps create a more positive health and safety climate—77 per cent of employees felt encouraged to raise concerns in a good health and safety climate, compared to 20 per cent who felt encouraged to do so in a poor health and safety climate. In poor health and safety climates, accident rates are highest among workplaces where employees do not feel their opinion matters.

Conferring with your employees also helps control common workplace risks such as slips and trips. Methods to control such risks were very effective in 76 per cent of cases where employees felt they were always consulted, but they were only considered very effective in 40 per cent of cases if employees thought they were rarely, or never, consulted.

Also, involving your employees in health and safety decisions greatly increases awareness of workplace risks, which in turn leads to a safer, healthier workplace. Workplaces that involve employees in health and safety decisions report that employers' awareness of workplace risks is 62 per cent, compared to a rate of just 28 per cent in workplaces where there is no involvement.

To boost your workplace's health and safety efficacy, go beyond simply fulfilling your legal obligation of consulting with employees on health and safety matters—intimately involve them in all health and safety planning and you will reap numerous benefits.

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Recent HSE News, Myths and Prosecutions

Burger van refuses to cut burger in half

A London burger van refused a customer's request to cut a burger in half, citing 'health and safety reasons'. The HSE Myth Busters Panel concluded this is not a health and safety matter. There is no legislation barring the worker from using a knife to cut food—in fact, the public expects them to safely do just that. The council declared it has a 'real beef' with these kinds of unhelpful responses which completely misuse the phrase 'health and safety'.

Primary school bans ladders

An Aberystwyth primary school banned the use of ladders in the classroom due to vague 'health and safety' reasons, and instead suggests the use of chairs to reach something at height. Of course, there is no health and safety law that prevents primary schools from using stepladders in classrooms. In fact, a properly designed stepladder will often be the most sensible and practical option for carrying out tasks that involve working at height for a short time—it is certainly better than standing on a chair.

£240,000 fine after driver crushed

A Stonehaven animal feed company was fined £240,000 after several safety failings led to the death of a lorry driver. The driver, a 49-year-old from Balmedie, was helping a forklift driver deposit 1.5 tonnes of feed in his lorry. However, as the operation commenced, the bin started to move on the forks, fell, and then crushed the lorry driver who was standing in front of the forklift. An HSE investigation uncovered an absence of safe working systems, inadequate training and lax rules regarding visiting drivers helping to load the grain.

Company fined after worker loses the tips of two fingers

A Newport food company was fined £2,400 and ordered to pay £4,373 in costs after an employee lost the tips of two fingers while using an unguarded machine. The worker, a 28-year-old woman from Cwmbran, was clearing cake mixture from a pipe with her hand when her fingers got caught in the machine's pump mechanism, severing the tips of her index and middle fingers on her right hand. The company failed to install safety bars on the machine which would have prevented the worker from touching the pump.

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