

HSE SAFETY CORNERSTONES

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Read about the justified prohibition of selfie sticks, how four individuals survived a harrowing visit to Tower Bridge, and how a building firm unknowingly exposed a pregnant woman to dangerous levels of carbon monoxide.

Violence at Work Continues to Decline

On 19 February, the HSE published the findings from its 2013-14 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), showing that the number and frequency of violent offences experienced in the workplace has continued to decline across the United Kingdom. The survey recorded 583,000 incidents of violence at work—269,000 assaults and 314,000 threats—which was a decrease of 73,000 incidents from 2012-13. Violence at work, as defined by the CSEW, is determined by the type of offence (assault or threat), what the victim was doing at the time of the incident and the relationship between the victim and the offender. The CSEW does not record domestic violence.

In the course of its investigation, the HSE explored which factors may have contributed to outbreaks of violence in the workplace. It found that only 35 per cent of incidents involved alcohol and 19 per cent involved drugs. However, it found that a much more relevant factor was the relationship between the victim and the offender. In 44 per cent of incidents, at least one of the individuals involved were either a client, customer or work colleague. Regardless of what may have instigated the confrontation, only 28 per cent resulted in injury—2 per cent were serious injuries, such as chipped or lost teeth, broken bones or concussions.

While the number and frequency of the violent offences experienced in the workplace has been declining for the past decade, it has not been an automatic process. Businesses like yours need to take an active role in mitigating workplace violence. Consider employing these six strategies to manage violent occurrences in the workplace:

- Conduct a thorough background check of each applicant to identify any possible warning signs that may point towards violence.
- Institute a zero-tolerance policy for workplace violence as well as verbal and nonverbal threats.
- Educate your employees on what constitutes as violence and how to report it through the appropriate channels.
- Reassure employees that their reports of threats or violence will be taken seriously and investigated.
- Outline a comprehensive management plan to maintain security. Include local police who can provide assistance in identifying preventive measures.
- Implement access controls—such as sign-in sheets, access cards or CCTV cameras—throughout your business to keep a consistent record of who enters and exits.

Violence experienced at work can cost your business serious time, money and employee productivity. And because the effects of workplace violence are first felt by employees, it is critical that you adopt a proactive approach for mitigating violence in the workplace so you can stop it before it starts.

For more information on the HSE's findings, visit:
www.hse.gov.uk/Statistics/causinj/violence/violence-at-work.pdf

Safety Wizard App Launched

A UK mobile software developer has released a new, free app to help businesses meet their health and safety requirements. The Safety Wizard app was designed to be a mobile version of the HSE Toolbox and provides businesses with guidance on what risk-preventive measures should be taken for a wide range of specific situations. Businesses will also have access to all of the HSE's health and safety data through the app.

The Safety Wizard app is the first mobile format of the HSE Toolbox that is available to businesses. Its universal access offers simple, streamlined navigation to provide risk management assistance to businesses regardless of time constraints or lack of resources. This new development marks a great improvement on the previous method of either referencing the toolbox's print edition—which has the potential to be outdated—or accessing it online through a stationary desktop.

As a business owner or manager, you may already know that referring to guidance from the HSE Toolbox is indispensable and inevitable; however, it may not always be convenient or even possible to review. To avoid such a lack of valuable information at your fingertips, it is critical that you as well as your employees download the Safety Wizard app. The app will always contain the most up-to-date HSE information, provide risk management guidance and can be accessed anytime, anywhere. Having this app in your 'toolbox' will help curb your business' liability and boost its health and safety programme.

For more information on the Safety Wizard app, visit:
<http://news.hse.gov.uk/2015/02/20/>



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NEWS AND PROSECUTIONS

Nightclub bans selfie sticks

A British nightclub banned selfie sticks, the mobile phone accessory, claiming that they posed health and safety risks to its customers. The HSE Myth Busters Panel concluded that it was reasonable to ban the use of the accessory due to the potential 'nuisance' that it may pose in a crowded venue. However, the panel believed that it was unnecessary to cite health and safety risks as the reasoning, as there are no specific rules which apply to the accessory's use.

London company responsible for Tower Bridge lift fall

A London lift company was fined £50,000 and ordered to pay £50,000 in costs after four tourists suffered fractures when a Tower Bridge lift fell three metres. The tourists were riding the lift when a counter-weight mechanism failed, causing the lift to drop. In the investigation, the HSE found that while the company displayed diligence in replacing damaged or worn-out lift components, it failed to identify the cause of the degradation. A more in-depth investigation by the lift company may have prevented the accident.

North West building firm exposed a pregnant woman to carbon monoxide

A North West building firm was fined £4,000 and order to pay £1,276 in costs after an eight-and-half-month pregnant woman and her husband displayed symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning. The couple's flue for their gas fire had become obstructed by rubble during a loft conversion in a neighbouring semi-detached property. In the investigation, the HSE found that the building firm had failed to adequately assess the potential risks of their project. Had they done so, they would have avoided exposing the woman, her unborn child and her husband to risk.

Council refuses to supply gardeners with sunscreen

A council refused to supply its gardeners with sun screen during hot weather, claiming it could have been a health and safety issue if someone was allergic. The HSE Myth Busters Panel concluded that, although the council is not obligated to supply outdoor workers with sun screen, masking its refusal to provide sun screen by citing vague health and safety reasons is irresponsible. Employers are encouraged to educate outdoor workers on the dangers of sun exposure.