

HSE SAFETY

CORNERSTONES

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Effective Storytelling Can Improve Workplace Safety

Employee safety is a chief concern for any business. And for a good reason, since the HSE estimates that work-related illnesses and injuries cost employers £13.8 billion a year and are responsible for 28.2 million lost working days annually. Despite those figures, motivating employees and capturing their attention whilst discussing health and safety can, at times, be challenging. Employees may find subjects to be dull, or may believe that the hazards being discussed do not affect them. However, in actuality, health and safety risks are always present in any industry. In an effort to better engage employees, some employers have begun to utilise storytelling techniques in their health and safety discussions.

Stories are an educational tool often used to teach particular lessons—in this instance, proper health and safety behaviour. Unlike other educational tools, such as presentations, lectures and handouts, stories can allow the audience to make an emotional, personal connection with the topics discussed. Therefore, a well-crafted story that testifies to the importance of health and safety may have the potential to reduce more work-related illnesses and injuries than if you were to solely provide your employees with facts and figures.

A successful, well-crafted story should be memorable and illustrate a particular lesson to employees in an enjoyable fashion. Such a story should be composed of four key 'ingredients', listed below, which help ensure that it has the greatest amount of impact on your employees.

1. The story should have a well-established central character with a name, an accessible position within your industry, and a relatable problem or obstacle.
2. The story should have a central obstacle or problem your character is facing that is simple, realistic and familiar to your employees.
3. The story should have a rhythm and pace, established through the use of colloquial dialogue that tells the story like you would to your mates.
4. The story should have a well-developed story arc with the following parts:
 - o Part 1: Introduce the central character and the scene.
 - o Part 2: Introduce the obstacle or problem that the character will need to overcome.
 - o Part 3: The resolution—you should then ask your audience, 'What did the character do correctly or incorrectly?' and 'How could the problem or obstacle have been avoided?'

These four ingredients can be supplemented with other educational tools to help create a narrative that links the facts and figures together in a personal, relatable manner. For example, instead of producing a traditional PowerPoint, create a narrative that runs through the presentation that makes each slide and the information on it engaging rather than forgettable.

Stories are able to capture the attention of an audience, and they have the potential to package health and safety information in a pleasant format that, when used effectively, can act as a persuasive risk management technique.



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HSE Launches New Health Expert Committee

To better address the damaging impact of workplace illnesses and injuries, the HSE recently formed the Workplace Health Expert Committee (WHEC). The problem of workplace illnesses and injuries is widespread—from 2013 to 2014, an estimated 1.2 million workers suffered from illnesses that were either caused or exacerbated by their workplaces. More than a quarter of those cases developed over the course of that year.

The WHEC will consist of nine scientific and medical experts who will provide independent expert knowledge and advice on workplace health to the chief scientific advisor and director of research at the HSE. Through the collective knowledge and professional expertise of its members, WHEC is expected to contribute to the safety and wellbeing of businesses through the following:

- Open and collaborative work with internal and external stakeholders, and the HSE's social and delivery partners
- Strategic work to identify issues of potential concern to the workplace
- Contributions to the development of an evidence base, analysis and interpretation of the collected evidence
- Expert assessments on the quality and relevance of evidence

As it would be difficult and nearly impossible to cover all potential workplace health and safety issues, WHEC will focus its efforts on these two main areas of concern:

- Chemical and physical hazards that could lead to injury or illness
- Human behavioural or organisational factors in the workplace (such as shift work) that could lead to physiological and psychological disorders

The expectation for the committee is that through the methodical evaluation of health and safety concerns, issues—such as the 13,000 lives lost each year to lung disease—will begin a swift decline.



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NEWS AND PROSECUTIONS

Child loses fingertips from a 'guillotine' park gate

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council was fined £13,000 and ordered to pay £1,317 in costs after a toddler was injured at a park. The two-year-old boy had gotten his fingers caught in an external gate when another child closed it, creating a guillotine effect that severed several of his fingertips. In its investigation, the HSE found that the risk assessment had only looked at the locking side of the gate and failed to notice that the stopper mechanism had been removed on the hinge side.

New HSE statistics reveal a decline in fatal injuries

Over the course of 20 years (from 1995 to 2015), the HSE has collected data on fatal injuries in the workplace. The data showed that fatal injuries have gradually declined over the past two decades. The death rate is currently at .46 deaths per 100,000 workers—9 per cent lower than the average of the previous five years.

Worker dies from exposure to steam during routine maintenance

A Staffordshire animal rendering and food waste recycling company was fined £660,000 and ordered to pay £187,632 in costs after a worker died during routine maintenance. The 50-year-old worker was attempting to repair an industrial cooker when steam was unexpectedly fed into the area—causing severe burns that contributed to his death. In its investigation, the HSE found that the company had failed to properly assess the potential risks involved with the repair and had not enforced the proper precautions.

Charity shop refused donations on the grounds of 'health and safety'

A charity shop refused to accept a donation of a plastic baby bath. The shop cited that due to 'health and safety' reasons, whoever purchased the bath could sue if his or her child was injured by a slip or fall. The HSE Myth Busters Panel concluded that there are no health and safety rules that would bar a resale shop from accepting such donations.