

HSE SAFETY CORNERSTONES

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HSE Releases 2014/2015 Health and Safety Statistics

The HSE recently published its 2014/2015 annual health and safety statistics report, which provides a way for your business to review how it fares in regard to the rest of the country. By examining the mistakes of the previous year, your business can better adapt your health and safety policy in order to more adequately protect your employees. Here are six key figures from 2014/2015:

1. Just as it was the previous year, over 1 million Britons were diagnosed with an illness that they had contracted through their workplace environments. In addition, an estimated 800,000 workers reported that a pre-existing health condition had been exacerbated or worsened due to their workplace conditions. Because neither figure improved over the course of the year, there are clearly still measures businesses can implement to reduce the impact of potential occupational health hazards.
2. Nearly 27 million working days were lost due to work-related ill health or injury, which is an average of 15 absentee-days per employee. Stress, anxiety, depression and musculoskeletal disorders accounted for the majority of days lost due to ill health.
3. RIDDOR reported that the number of injuries suffered by employees fell by 1,593 last year. Additionally, the number of other workplace injuries decreased by 18,000, according to the Labour Force Survey. The three most common injuries that were reported were: slips and trips (28 per cent); handling, lifting or carrying (23 per cent); and being struck by a moving object (10 per cent).
4. While the number of workplace injuries has fallen this past year, the number of deaths has increased by nearly 10 per cent. Yet, within the context of the report, this figure should be viewed as an outlier since the majority of the figures experienced a slight improvement.
5. Workplace injuries and new cases of ill health cost the British economy an estimated £14.3 billion—nearly identical to the previous year.
6. Out of the 728 cases which involved health and safety breaches, 682 led to convictions of at least one offence. Additionally, the fines collected for these convictions totalled £19 million. With a conviction rate of 94 per cent, health and safety prevention must be made a priority, because if your business is prosecuted, it is very likely that you will be convicted. While the report only documents monetary penalties, a conviction carries with it other costs—such as reputation damage.

Despite the fact that a majority of the figures outlined in the report saw a slight improvement over the past year, health and safety should still be top of mind. To help ensure that your health and safety scheme is thorough and comprehensive, periodically inspect your business to identify any hazards, and discuss with your employees what risks they regularly face to better address any potential issues.

Additionally, if you are interested in examining the 2014/2015 health and safety statistics report in its entirety, you can view it here: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/index.htm>.

Preventing Respiratory Illness

Each year, there are an estimated 12,000 deaths from occupational respiratory diseases, according to the most recent statistics from the HSE. Despite the fact that a majority of businesses regularly discuss health and safety, only 33 per cent of UK businesses have a specific annual budget for health and safety, according to the European Survey on New and Emerging Risks. While efforts have been made to reduce occupational health hazards (such as respiratory illness), more are needed to adequately protect British workers.

One such area of concern is respirable crystalline silica (RCS), the leading cause of lung cancer and respiratory disease—with an estimated 800 lung cancer deaths attributed to the substance each year. In an effort to better inform and educate British workers about the dangers of RCS, the HSE has produced two videos.

The first is an interview with a former stoneworker of more than 30 years. Unaware of RCS and the dangers that it could pose to his health, the worker developed silicosis, a serious respiratory condition that has shortened his lifespan. The video can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHacjn4qjoQ.

The second video is 'Stop Dust Before It Stops You', an award-winning animated film about the dangers of working around RCS. The film focuses on a quarry worker who ignores proper dust safety practices and gradually becomes ill. Interspersed between the scenes of the worker completing various tasks are sequences from the Quarries Partnership Team, which illustrate the proper safety procedures for each task. The video can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWLPmQpMQCU.

While RCS is not a universal occupational health hazard, its potentially devastating effects illustrates the importance of implementing a proper health and safety programme. For that reason, it would be beneficial to review your business' workplace environment to identify and address potential hazards before they become detrimental.



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NEWS AND PROSECUTIONS

Building firm brought to court for ignoring HSE enforcement notices

Meadowdale Homes, a Kingswinford building firm, was fined £15,000 and ordered to pay £1,617 in costs after one of its building contractors repeatedly ignored enforcement notices from the HSE. The notices were for improperly installed scaffolding and violations of work at height practices, and they were discovered during routine inspections. Had the firm been more organised and immediately addressed the concerns outlined in the notices, it would not have been fined.

Skip company and director fined after worker killed in excavator fall

South Coast Skips Ltd, a West Sussex waste management firm, and its owner were fined £65,000 and ordered to pay £25,000 in costs after one worker was killed and another was seriously injured in an accident. Both men were working in the bucket of an excavator when the hydraulics malfunctioned, causing the men to fall 9 metres to the cement floor. In its investigation, the HSE found that the firm did not provide its employees with proper training or supervision, and that health and safety was not a core part of its workplace culture.

Firm sentenced after worker dies from inhaling paint stripper

Diamond Wheels (Dundee) Limited, an alloy wheel refurbishment firm, was fined £50,000 after a worker died from inhaling toxic fumes while cleaning a paint stripping chemical tank. In its investigation, the HSE found that the worker had not received formal training on how to safely use the cleaning chemicals or on how to properly clean the tank.

Carpenter in court after trainee's fingers were severed

Fabs Designs, a Bedfordshire carpentry business, was fined £200 and ordered to pay £500 in costs after failing to report an accident in which an apprentice lost two fingers. The HSE found out about the accident when one of the apprentice's family members reported it. Had the business followed Regulation 3(1) of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995, it would not have been fined.