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HSE Safety Cornerstones Newsletter

A newsletter of practical compliance and safety tips provided by
Crendon Insurance Brokers Ltd

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Have You Reviewed Your Risk Assessment Lately?

When was the last time you reviewed your business' workplace risk assessment? Not just hastily flipped through it, but carefully reviewed it? Chances are it has been too long. Because employers are often bogged down by the day-to-day minutiae of running a business, they tend to forget about macro-level concerns like risk assessments.

But just because risk assessments can be easily forgotten does not make them unimportant. On the contrary, drafting or reviewing a risk assessment is one of the most important things you can do to protect your employees and your business. It is also the law.

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (2000 in Northern Ireland), every UK employer must make a 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessment of the health and safety risks faced by workers and any other persons who may be affected by their businesses. These assessments help employers understand what procedures are necessary to keep employees and third parties safe throughout the working day.

Risk assessments are careful examinations of what things in your business could harm employees, customers or others. Employers with five or more employees are required to keep a written record of all risk assessments. Even if you employ fewer than five people, recording your risk assessment is still best practice.

Whether you are obligated to record your risk assessment or not, all employers must review their business' risk assessments as the need arises. You should review your risk assessment on an ongoing basis, but especially when changes introduce new hazards into your workplace—changes such as new equipment, substances or procedures. Whenever your business undergoes one of these changes, review your risk assessment immediately to see whether the recent change ushered in any new hazards which threaten the health and safety of your employees. Better yet, consider the impact of any potential changes on your risk assessment before you implement them. That way you will be more prepared for new hazards and how to minimise them.

When you review your risk assessment, remember that it should apply to everyone—your risk assessment should cover all groups of people who might be harmed by your business. That may seem like a daunting task, but it is not impossible. Think about the types of workers you employ—new and young, migrant, disabled, expectant mothers, etc. At the same time, consider every hazard your business presents. Do this by slowly surveying the workplace. To avoid being overwhelmed, review one hazard at a time. That will help you compartmentalise each hazard and employee type rather than being faced with a slew of hazards you find difficult to organise.

Being behind on your risk assessment reviews does not mean you cannot catch up. We are here to help. Contact the insurance professionals at Crendon Insurance Brokers Ltd for more information on creating, maintaining and updating your risk assessment.



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The Benefits of Managing Work-related Stress

Work-related stress causes workers in Great Britain to lose 10.4 million working days every year, according to a recent HSE report. On average, each person suffering from this condition took 24 days off work last year. Clearly work-related stress is a serious drain on productivity and employee health, but distinguishing damaging stress from motivating pressure can be difficult.

Work-related stress is the adverse reaction people have to managing excessive pressures and other demands at work. The distinction between stress and pressure boils down to excess—if the pressure is not excessive, employees should feel challenged and motivated. If the pressure is excessive, employees feel overwhelmed and take time from work to recuperate.

All employers are legally required to assess employees' risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 further dictates that employers must take measures to control that risk. Requirements aside, there are scores of benefits to managing work-related stress, including the following:

- Fewer staff absences and higher productivity, which translate to lower personnel costs
- Greater employee reliability and engagement
- Increased staff retention, which reduces overall recruitment expenses
- Lower indemnity insurance premiums
- Boosted staff morale
- Improved organisational reputation
- Better relationships with clients and suppliers
- Friendlier interactions between managers and employees
- Smaller risk of workplace accidents



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Recent HSE Myths and Prosecutions

Store refuses to test light bulbs

A customer bought a set of light bulbs from an Aberdeen home improvement store only to discover at home that one of the bulbs was a dud. When the customer returned to the store to return the defective bulb, she asked if an employee could test her replacement bulb. The employee declined, citing 'health and safety reasons' that prohibited testing light bulbs in the shop. The HSE Myth Busters Panel declared that there is no health and safety legislation forbidding testing light bulbs prior to sale and that it is difficult to think of even one valid reason for refusing this simple service.

Shop door 'required' to remain open

A North East man attempted to close a shop door to keep out the cold air after he entered, but was told by employees the door must remain open to allow wheelchair users access. The employees invoked 'health and safety' as the reason for keeping a door open to the elements in winter. The shop confirmed it has an 'open doors' policy, but that the employees were misinformed when they cited health and safety as the reason. It was merely a business decision. The HSE panel pointed out there is no reason for requiring a door to remain open, especially in January.

Hot drink trolley service refused due to health and safety

Staff at an East Midlands dog show had plenty to be icy about after they were refused hot drink trolley service due to health and safety concerns—that the drinks trolley attendant passing hot drinks to staff might be dangerous. The HSE panel immediately dismissed this prohibition as ridiculous, since hot drinks are served in much more dangerous conditions, such as moving trains. It is a simple over-reaction to an easily manageable hazard.

Multiple violations for Holmfirth Firm

The owners of a Holmfirth business park were fined £7,000 and ordered to pay £1,355 in costs after health and safety failings led to a 68-year-old maintenance worker fracturing his ankle. The worker was on a ladder removing heat exchange units from the roof space of a former machine shop in Huddersfield Road. His co-worker, a cleaner, was steadying the ladder on the ground when it was knocked from his hands. The maintenance worker fell 4 to 5 metres. The HSE uncovered a deplorable lack of workplace health and safety risk assessments.

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