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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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Managing Fire Safety in the Workplace

Fire does not discriminate. No matter how much you stress workplace fire safety prevention, one slip-up is all it takes to start a fire that can reduce your entire business to ashes in a matter of hours.

The good news is that most fires are preventable. As an owner or manager responsible for your workplace and other buildings to which the public have access, you can avoid fires by assessing your business' fire risk and adopting the right behaviours and procedures to extinguish the threat of fire.

A workplace fire is a huge, deadly hazard with enduring consequences. It can physically damage or destroy buildings, contents and equipment, and can cause serious injuries or even death to your employees and members of the public. Common injuries include burns, lasting respiratory damage from smoke inhalation, oxygen depletion and trauma such as broken bones from last-ditch escape attempts.

The first step in assessing your business' fire risk is determining how fires start. Fires need the following three elements:

- **Source of ignition (heat)** – heaters, lighting, naked flames, electrical equipment, smokers' materials (cigarettes, matches) and anything else that can get very hot or cause sparks
- **Source of fuel (something that burns)** – wood, paper, plastic, foam, loose packaging materials, rubbish, furniture and anything else that is flammable
- **Oxygen** – air, chemicals that contain oxidising agents, and oxygen supplies from cylinder storage and piped systems

The next step is a mandatory one: All employers, building owners and occupiers must carry out a fire safety risk assessment and keep it up to date. Your risk assessment can be part of a larger assessment or an individual exercise.

Using the findings of your assessment, ensure that adequate and appropriate fire safety measures are in place to lessen the risk of injury or death in the event of a fire. To help prevent fire in the workplace, your risk assessment should identify what would cause a fire—sources of ignition and substances that burn—and the people who may be at risk. It should also identify dangerous substances that can result in fires or explosions.

After pinpointing your risks, take concrete steps to control them, such as those listed below:

- Keep sources of ignition and flammable substance separate.
- Avoid accidental fires. For example, make sure heaters cannot be knocked over.
- Ensure good housekeeping at all times to avoid build-up of rubbish that could burn.

Contact the insurance professionals at Crendon Insurance Brokers Ltd for more detailed information on workplace fire risk assessments.



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Hiring Temporary Workers This Summer?

The number of temporary workers across the United Kingdom between January and March 2014 was 1.6 million, a boost of almost 3 per cent compared to the same three-month period last year, according to the Office of National Statistics. And now that summer is in full bloom, with students taking advantage of seasonal employment, the increase in temporary workers shows no signs of slackening.

If you are hiring temporary workers to satisfy seasonal demands this summer, make sure to provide them with the same level of health and safety protection as your full- or part-time employees.

Because of their transitory status, temporary workers' health and safety needs are sometimes accidentally left out of business' general workplace policies and procedures. Do not become lax on health and safety and neglect your responsibility to ensure protection for every employee—no matter how long they will work for your company.

Before you hire temporary workers, accomplish the following:

- Ensure temporary workers are covered by existing risk assessments, and that they know what measures have been taken to protect them. If need be, undertake extra risk assessments to cover temporary workers' additional risks.
- Establish that temporary workers have received any requisite training and that they understand the instructions necessary for working safely.
- Provide for the language needs of workers who speak limited English or none at all.
- Check that they have the necessary skills and occupational qualifications.

If you are hiring young workers, make sure to account for their lack of experience, lack of maturity and potential ignorance of existing or potential risks. Your business could be a temporary worker's first job—remember to provide adequate supervision and training to limit his or her risk and the risk to other employees.



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Recent HSE News, Myths and Prosecutions

Shopkeeper forced to remove direction signs

A Bridgend shopkeeper was forced by the local council to remove signs pointing to his store due to non-existent health and safety regulations. The council gave the shopkeeper an array of excuses for why he cannot post signs, including that they are 'dangerous'. The HSE Myth Busters panel decided this case had nothing to do with health and safety regulations, but rather with local planning laws. The local council has since acknowledged its communication breakdown.

Two firms sentenced after worker's hand crushed

Two Scottish engineering firms were fined a total of £26,000 after safety failings led to a worker's hand being crushed while unloading steel beams. The 54-year-old HGV driver was standing on a flatbed trailer coordinating the unloading when a forklift operator began to raise a bundle of beams from the flatbed. The bundle became unstable, rolled away and pinned the driver's feet against the trailer, causing him to fall with his feet still trapped and extend his right hand to break the fall. All four fingers on his right hand were shattered. After a 12-hour emergency surgery, the driver has yet to regain sufficient function in his right hand, potentially barring him from ever returning to work as an HGV driver.

Slip leads to worker's loss of fingertips

A Leeds-based company was fined £8,500 and ordered to pay £794 in costs after poor housekeeping and a missing safety guard in its Newcastle factory caused a 26-year-old worker to lose two fingertips. The worker slipped on ice from a malfunctioning freezer and instinctively reached out to steady himself, inadvertently grabbing the drive chain of a moving conveyor that did not have the necessary safety guard. The worker has since returned to work.

Electric sliding gate causes child's death

A Swansea installation firm and a Cardiff maintenance company were fined and ordered to pay costs that totalled £190,000 after serious safety failings led to a five-year-old girl being crushed to death. The girl was playing around gates near her home that would automatically close after a car passed through, with a force equivalent to 220 kilograms. Lax safety checks and insufficient safety devices resulted in the gate closing despite a person being in the way.

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