

# Health and safety at work

[Law](#), [Security](#)



Critically review your own organisation's Health and Safety Policy and procedures and make recommendations for improvements. Organisations today widely regard their employees as their greatest assets, so it is no wonder that they are spending an increasing amount of their resources on ensuring that the workplace and work systems enable its staff to feel safe and secure; as management continues to take an active role in their wellbeing. Failure to ensure and provide a safe working environment can raise concerns in a variety of areas such as legal, financial and ethical issues.

In the United Kingdom there are legislations in place designed to ensure that correct and appropriate systems of work, in regards to health and safety, exist within every organisation. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HASWA), section 2, " It shall be the duty of every employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees. " This highlights the responsibility employers have in ensuring their employees are safe of chemical, physical and machinery hazards and risks.

Hazards can be defined as something that can cause adverse effects, such as water on a staircase because of the possibility of you slipping on it and hurting yourself. A risk is the likelihood that a hazard will actually cause its adverse effects, together with a measure of the effect. Risks are usually expressed as facts with a quantifiable likelihood, such as " one in a hundred", paired with the effect and hazard, " fatal accident [effect] at work [hazard]". Other important sections to highlight within the HASWA are section 3 " It shall be the duty of every employer... so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons not in his employment who may be affected

thereby are not thereby exposed to risks to their health and safety. ” This underlines the responsibility employers have of ensuring members of the public and non-employees are not exposed to any risks. HASWA 1974, s7; “ It shall be the duty of every employee while at work to take reasonable care for the health and safety of himself and of other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work”.

This states the duty every employee has in ensuring their own wellbeing within the workplace as well as their conduct in ensuring the health safety of their colleagues. HASWA s8; “ No person shall intentionally or recklessly interfere with or misuse anything provided in the interests of health, safety or welfare in pursuance of any of the relevant statutory provisions. ” Section 8 talks of the importance of not misusing or damaging property and equipment at work under a legal obligation.

From each of these sections there are key phrases and words which can be interpreted differently and applied in various contexts. “ So far as is reasonably practicable”, for example, involves weighing the risk against the time, money and trouble needed to control it. This is normally expected to be exerted to different extents within different organisations. In a small business with 5 employees it may be ‘ unreasonable’ to put in place a system to prevent doors shutting abruptly due to the nature of the organisation and the cost of implementation.

However if in a bigger organisation of significantly more employees (150), then the risk of getting fingers trapped in the door are increased, so this may be an issue that would need investigating and probably amended in order to

comply with the act. I am going to make a risk assessment of my work place in my area of operation focusing on some of the health and safety concerns and what can or has been done to rectify the issue. My workplace is in ' 23 New Mount Street' which is a grade 2 listed building of serviced offices. It used to be an old mill, later home to the ' Cooperative Printing Society', and now converted into a set of offices.

My office is on the second floor for which you have to take stairs to enter the building and then an elevator up to the office space. One of the health and safety issues present at my workplace is the possibility of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) when working on the computers. Since the introduction of technology and computing that involves the use of the keyboard and mouse there has always been the risk of RSI which can be due to posture held when working or the strain on your eyes caused by the glare of the computer screen.

RSI occurs when you work for prolonged periods of time on the computer without taking breaks to stretch your muscles and rest. Currently in the organisation there are adjustable chairs to sit on when working on computers so the individual can alter the height of the chair to align themselves with the monitor screen. This also helps improve the posture of the individual. This complies with The Health And Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 by meeting the minimum requirements for the work chair and other equipment.

There is also a " RSI Awareness" notice on near the workstations to make sure they are aware of safe computer usage. If further action was to be

taken then they should try and do more in ensuring that regular breaks are taken as sometimes working on computers can make you lose track of the time, “ Every employer shall so plan the activities of users at work in his undertaking that their daily work on display screen equipment is periodically interrupted by such breaks or changes of activity as reduce their workload at that equipment”, The Health And Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, s4.

This is not a high-risk hazard as the users of the computers are already made aware of RSI so within this organisation spending the extra resources may not be ‘ reasonably practicable’. Also this is an issue that should be enforced by the employee themselves under the HASWA 1974, s7, “ take reasonable care for the health and safety of himself”; because the equipment is there for them to use it just has to be used responsibly.

This can be extended further to bring in the manufacturers and designers of office equipment under HASWA , s6. 1a “ It shall be the duty of any person who designs, manufactures, imports or supplies any article for use at work - to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the article is so designed and constructed as to be safe and without risks to health when properly used” . If there wasn’t ‘ safe’ article provided by the office then they would not be complying with the HASWA, s6.

To extend it even further it could be applied to the manufacturers and designers to ensure that it minimises the risks to health and safety, “ It shall be the duty of any person who undertakes the design or manufacture of any article for use at work to carry out or arrange for the carrying out of any

necessary to research with a view to the discovery and, so far as is reasonably practicable the elimination or minimisation of any risks to health or safety to which the design or article may give rise”, HASWA s6. 2.

Another key issue is concerning the nature of the office building and its use of equipment. As this building has a number of office spaces usually leased on short term basis, 6 months minimum, there is usually office furniture and equipment left in hallways and corridors to moved in or out of the building and or in and out of office spaces. This is a safety concern in that it is obstructing paths and a hazard for someone to trip over them. It is also a fire safety concern as it can be seen to be blocking paths that lead to fire exits and escape routes.

This can fall under HASWA, s2. 2b, “ arrangements for ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, safety and absence of risks to health in connection with the use, handling, storage and transport of articles and substances”. As well as that under The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, s14. 1, “ Where necessary in order to safeguard the safety of relevant persons, the responsible person must ensure that routes to emergency exits from premises and the exits themselves are kept clear at all times”.

This once again puts the earnest on the employer or person responsible for Health and Safety to ensure that the premises are free of hazards that could cause injury or a potential fire exit obstruction and to make sure that necessary precautionary measures are put in place in the case of an emergency such as fire, “ Every employer shall establish and where necessary give effect to appropriate procedures to be followed in the event

of serious and imminent danger to persons at work in his undertaking”, The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, s8. a. In order to comply with the legislation I think the organisation needs to make the office users aware of their responsibility in ensuring that they are not disregarding the legislation and are to be held accountable for their actions. They should also make transportation and storage of their equipment, e. g desks and chairs, in a storage room or at least out of corridors as not to obstruct the people within the building.

Health and safety at the workplace is a major issue for every organisation as it directly affects its employees in being able to work in a safe working environment. The issue of health and safety should be at the forefront of not only employers but employees as well as they can be liable, as a result of their own actions, for their own safety as well as other colleagues in the workplace and non-employees of the organisation who use the building; safety everyone’s responsibility.

In the United Kingdom mostly all of the health and safety laws and legislations are governed by the phrase “ so far as is reasonably practicable”, this means that every health and safety issue is a matter of relativity where the employer must assess the relative costs and benefits of any health and safety measures with time, trouble and money taken to implement it. If the costs are grossly disproportionate to the benefits then they are not obliged to amend it according to law and the phrase “ so far as is reasonably practicable”.

In every organisation there are issues concerning health and safety and they all differ depending on the nature of the organisation, i. e type of work, number of employees, resources etc. Within my own organisation most of the issues of Health and Safety are dealt with by the organisation in charge of the office. However within the office space I am accountable for the health and safety. To ensure health and safety is implemented effectively I believe it is necessary to educate the employees. The employees need to be aware of what they are responsible for and how they must work safely.

Awareness is probably the biggest factor in ensuring good health and safety practices are implemented within the organisation. Bibliography Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/37/contents>

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