

Ignorance, not so blissful

I'm sure it isn't a big revelation that the investigatory activities of HSE often results in fines and these penalties now are becoming steeper and often can do significant damage to a business's bottom line and reputation so, is ignorance of regulation an excuse? Unfortunately, not so – do you know what your responsibilities are, asks Phil Pinnington

If we firstly look at where health and safety law applies – if your business employs fewer than five people (including directors) then technically lots of the things that the law demands that are written down don't apply to you although we would certainly recommend that you keep paper or electronic records.

Health and Safety Policy

So, for any business there must be a health and safety Policy. This should include your statement of intent, signed by the most senior person along with the policy which sets out how you plan to execute your duties.

A statement of intent template can easily be found on the internet but it **MUST** be tailored to your business so a tip is to read the contents. By signing this you are effectively confirming your commitment to what it contains.

Communicate

The most successful businesses owe this success to good communication between workers and management. To ensure compliance with your H&S obligations it is important that you foster and commit to two-way communication, that is to say, don't just issue edicts; listen to concerns and suggestions from your employees. In my own career I have found time and time again that these conversations often offer valuable insights that as directors you may have missed.

Assessing risk

Every business has risks: financial, reputational and safety. The principles in identifying, quantifying and controlling them is no dark art or skill that requires complex training. If you operate a small business I would strongly recommend that it makes business sense to access training to help you formulate the process of identifying and assessing a risk.

A term I have often used and has served as an aid is 'risks associated with life in general can usually be ignored', so focus on the actual hazards not the incidentals that have a very low probability of occurring. These can be assessed and you will often find that you have less to be concerned about and you can prove it if challenged.

At the GGF we have examples of how to conduct risk assessments but there are many other examples available. Employers should find ones that best suit their way of working.

Act – how to control a risk

There is a temptation to assume. How often do you see assessments where 'suitably trained' is listed as a control measure? As the responsible person, a director, needs to be able to define what this statement means so



Phil Pinnington, health and safety director for the GGF

you should make sure that what constitutes suitability is understood by all e.g. manual handling training can be in the form of a video or a half-day course. As the employer you must ensure that what is required is fit for purpose.

Review – things change

To quote Ben Franklin, 'nothing can be said for certain other than death and taxes'. No assessment I have ever seen is 100% accurate at issue simply because risks and hazards change. If your controls are effective the risk levels won't increase but reviewing is a critical part of safety management.

Processes change and new technologies come to market so taking time to review is valuable. Another advantage of reviewing is things that may have been missed previously are picked up.

Later in the year the GGF plans to hold short seminars on this subject for small business owners helping them to achieve a better understanding of their obligations. □

The GGF's health and safety committee meets quarterly to discuss key issues affecting the industry. If you are interested in finding out more about the GGF and its health and safety function, please email info@ggf.org.uk