

The double-edged sword

Factory floors, warehouse equipped with heavy-loading machinery and worst of all, car parks. When evaluating the risks of the work place, there are plenty of areas that cause for health and safety concerns. But how often are both of those concerns addressed? GGF health and safety director, Phil Pinnington, estimates it's less often than you think

In September 2017 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) launched its *Go Home Healthy* campaign. The aim of this campaign is quite simple. Despite years of work, we continue to have individuals who, through no direct fault of their own, suffer injury or illness connected with their work activity.

Historically HSE focused our attention on those areas where statistics have shown there's a problem. So, construction has, for many years, been at the forefront of safety initiatives and rightly so, but what can so often be missed, is those working in small enterprises and specifically those in factories.

Our industry is no different than any other in that the health risks have slipped down the priority list. Safety has been the primary in the 'health and safety' message but what we are now challenged to consider, is how our employees' health can be affected by what we ask of them.

In our industry we continue to use materials and chemicals that if used properly don't pose a significant risk, but are they being used correctly? Do workers know they should wash hands before eating or drinking if the chemicals could cause harm if ingested?

Those working with leads have been aware for many years about the dangers and have quite strict control measures in place; but what about those glass cleaners, adhesives and putties? Do your employees know how to handle them properly?

As employers it is your duty to keep your employees reasonably informed. Suppliers are obliged to provide you with the correct information on how to store and use their products. They also must give you information regarding any health effects so it is prudent to take the time to check these. You may well be using something that may increase the risk of dermatitis if gloves are not worn. Another material may, when used in close quarters, be a respiratory risk if respiratory protection isn't worn.

It's always advisable to find and provide your employees with the safest materials to do the job. That's not always possible but when you know that there are necessary controls needed when handling or using them it is expected that you enforce them. Telling employees of the risk and giving them PPE isn't enough.

Providing statistics to persuade we know doesn't work with everybody but personalising outcomes is often a powerful carrier to get the message across.

We at the GGF are committed to the HSE five year strategy *Helping Britain Work Well* and continue to offer our members advice, case studies and guidance in an effort to communicate this message. □



Phil Pinnington, health and safety director for the GGF

"Our employees' health can be affected by what we ask of them"

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