

NEW RESEARCH SHOWS SURPRISING ATTITUDES TOWARDS HEALTH AND SAFETY

HSE launches new strategy for a common sense approach to risk at work

Workplace deaths and injuries have fallen over the past thirty years but thousands still die every year as a result of work related accidents and ill-health.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) will launch a new strategy, *Be Part of the Solution*, on 3 June designed to reduce the number of workplace accidents and take a common sense approach to ensuring that risk management is an enabler for business not a burden.

New research due to be published on Wednesday demonstrates that employers and workers alike both recognise overwhelmingly that providing a safe workplace makes sound commercial sense. Nearly 90 per cent of business leaders say that people are their organisation's most important asset. In addition to preventing accidents, 65 per cent of employees say that good health and safety practices make them feel valued.

The recession could make some workplaces more dangerous, as more than a quarter of business leaders say that that their organisation will face pressure to cut spending on health and safety this year. This is not only potentially dangerous but could also be bad for business; nearly eight in ten business leaders acknowledge that good health and safety standards are beneficial. In part this is because the cost of preventing accidents is almost always less than the costs associated with an accident once it happens.

Almost half of Britain's workers know someone who has been injured at work, yet the actual rate of deaths and serious injuries is greatly underestimated. On average, employees think that 3,000 people were killed or seriously injured at work last year, but the true number is 136,000 – more than 45 times higher.

Too often health and safety is seen as trivial or the preserve of 'jobsworths', rather than preventing tragedy. A third of employees wrongly think that HSE bans wearing flip-flops at work or children playing with conkers. In fact, HSE is focused on real risks and preventing the serious harm that dangerous workplaces can cause.

The most effective way to improve health and safety practices is for senior management to show leadership on the issue. HSE is thus calling on leaders today to sign a pledge to 'Be Part of the Solution' and improve health and safety standards.

Judith Hackitt, Chair of HSE said:

"HSE is not, and never will be, 'the fun police.' Our new strategy shows the way towards a common sense attitude to health and safety. As regulators, our approach to businesses will be proportionate to the risk they present and their approach to managing it. We are calling on employers and business owners to take the lead themselves in preventing the thousands of deaths every year which are caused by work – it is their moral and legal duty and it is good for the business."

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, James Purnell said:

“There are too many clichés about the role of ‘health and safety’ in our society. But amidst ridiculous myths about banning donkeys and flip flops, the fact is that too many people are still needlessly killed or injured. The fact that some people go out to work and never return home to their families is a human tragedy. The new HSE strategy recognises that a significant challenge now faces everyone with a stake in health and safety. We need to do everything we can to drive down the toll of death and injury.”

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Notes to editors

1. The strategy will be launched at 10am on Wednesday 3 June at Central Hall Westminster. Please contact mmansfeld@webershandwick.com if you would like to attend.
2. Interviews were conducted online among 1002 employees and 200 business leaders between 1st and 11th May 2009. The data for employees has been weighted according to the Annual Business Inquiry run by the ONS, in terms of age, sex, region and company size.
3. HSE’s mission is to prevent death, injury and ill health in Great Britain’s workplaces. It does so through research, information and advice, promoting training, new or revised regulations and codes of practice and, working with local authority partners, by inspection, investigation and enforcement.
4. HSE ran a three month consultation on the new strategy, and invited a wide range of stakeholders to take part. Further information on the consultation can be found here www.hse.gov.uk/strategy.
5. The Be Part of the Solution pledge can be found here www.hse.gov.uk/strategy/pledge. Business leaders are invited to sign up online to show their commitment to keeping workplaces safe.
6. For further information please contact HSE Public Relations Office on 0151 951 5778.

HSE information and news releases can be accessed on the Internet www.hse.gov.uk/