

Health and safety – in numbers

Andrew Mills, chair of the Guernsey Occupational Safety and Health Association (GOSHA), looks at the latest Guernsey statistics and the lessons that can be learned.



Health and safety management can be an emotive topic. If you do it well, it makes your business better – becoming more efficient and effective with a happier workforce. Do it badly, or choose to ignore it, and sooner or later things will go wrong.

The consequences of injury or ill-health caused by work undertaken for an entity in Guernsey can be huge. The reputational costs can be catastrophic and the financial costs can be eye-watering – the largest personal injury claim award in Guernsey is over £14m.

The regular compilation of health and safety statistics for businesses in Guernsey is, therefore, an interesting production. They show how we are doing as an island, sectors and issues for improvement, trends, and the costs to business in terms of lost manpower.

The latest figures are available at www.gov.gg/hse and show a total number of incidents of 212 in 2023 (the most recent year available), as compared with 197 in 2022 and 190 in 2021.

The total number of incidents fell during the Covid period and has now risen again. However, I'm glad to say the total number is lower than the pre-pandemic period (in 2019, there were 380 reported incidents). But the total is still too high. These are the more serious workplace incidents and we have, on average, four every week.

There will be various factors driving this, with the construction sector a significant contributor. Construction sites are hazardous, but they don't have to be places where people are seriously hurt or suffer significant ill-health. The incidents arise from a variety of sources, including chemicals, falls and dust.

Some of the island's largest contractors have proactively worked to make their sites and work practices safe, and have proportionately far fewer incidents than some of our smaller construction businesses. If people work for you, they deserve to be safe.

The property sector generally generates serious incidents every year, from people slipping and tripping to building management issues such as the identification and management of asbestos and control of the legionella bacterium. Awareness of your responsibilities, addressing the hazards, and maintaining good knowledge of the effective management of property are essential elements in owning and managing property in Guernsey.

The HSE produces some very helpful guidance. There is a Construction Approved Code of Practice, which is compulsory to follow. If you need further guidance, you can access a number of Guernsey based consultants and specialist support businesses. There are training courses and some of the IOSH professional courses will help you to be better informed – they range from basic safety awareness and management to the highest professional safety qualifications.

Remember the Guernsey Health and Safety Ordinance of 1987 is a strong, robust and clear law that sets out responsibilities for everyone in our island who owns, runs or works in an island business, charity or other organisation here in Guernsey.

Don't end up being another number in Guernsey's ill-health and accidents statistics caused by workplace activities.

“
THE REPUTATIONAL
COSTS CAN BE
CATASTROPHIC AND
THE FINANCIAL COSTS
CAN BE EYE-WATERING –
THE LARGEST PERSONAL
INJURY CLAIM AWARD
IN GUERNSEY IS OVER
£14M.
”



Guernsey
Occupational
Safety
&
Health
Association