

Workplace safety & health – don't ignore it



WORKPLACE safety and health. If you use these words, you'll often receive an emotive response – some people will glare over, uninterested, some people will be angry, some people will be indifferent, and some will think that's good for me. In fact, it is relevant to everyone and good for everyone in our island. It is one of Gosha's main aims to ensure people are aware of the relevance of safe working environments, of achieving good workplace health, of their responsibilities and of the benefits of good safety and health management. After all, it is Guernsey law and you must be compliant.

It is everyone's duty to take sensible, proactive care of themselves and their colleagues and the community in which we live. We all have responsibilities, both those who work in an organisation and employers. In fact, we all have duties: employers, employees, contractors, sub-contractors and volunteers. We all have duties to protect ourselves, to protect each other and to protect customers, neighbours, visitors and the general public.

Maintaining a working environment which is free from the potential for accident, injury, death or work-induced illness is impossible to achieve. Some of the worst incidents recorded should have been easily mitigated or avoided altogether, if people had taken care, had been given training, had used protective equipment and good tools, had followed instructions and done things properly. When Gosha first started in 2004, many people in Guernsey organisations took a somewhat cavalier approach to safety and health. Nowadays, the number of accidents and other incidents has fallen significantly (nearly halved) but there are still too many incidents which could and should have been avoided by following sensible practices, many of which cost nothing or next to nothing to implement.

The consequences of failing to act properly and sensibly can be catastrophic for both employer and the other people involved. To ask employer, the costs to an otherwise successful business can quickly mount and will not all be covered by insurance if it has been arranged, which it must be for injury and death to employees and should otherwise be arranged to protect a business or other organisation from lawsuits brought by others – remember



Andrew Mills, chairman of the Guernsey Occupational Safety & Health Association, explains the importance of ensuring a safe and healthy working environment

customers expect insurance to be in place).

Here are some examples of the costs which can arise:

- Loss of a good employee and the costs of replacing them;
 - Reputational – a damaged reputation is hard to recover from and for some may be the cause of going out of business;
 - Investigation costs including diverted management time;
 - Delayed customer service and orders – some orders may be cancelled;
 - Fines and other legal penalties;
 - Financial compensation – Guernsey's largest reported personal injury claim for an individual is around £14m, and there have been many where the cost has exceeded £1m.
- People underestimate the damage a serious incident can do to a business. Conversely, the costs of good practice are often negligible or avoided altogether. And good practice makes employees and others feel valued, makes for more pleasant working environments and makes customers and others confident in the quality of service a business delivers and any

products it supplies.

Being ready to deal with the consequences of a serious incident can be a great way to mitigate losses and costs which may otherwise occur. Business continuity plans made a significant, positive difference to a number of Guernsey businesses which had them when Covid interruptions occurred in Guernsey. They are well worth having in place, and should be regularly reviewed and, where necessary, updated from time to time to help a business overcome any interruption incident which arises. There have been some terrible incidents which have occurred in the past, and if better practice had been engaged would have been readily avoided. There is lots of advice available, check out the HSE's website in Guernsey and the UK – the addresses are www.gov.gu and www.gov.uk and you'll find details of consultants and others willing to assist in Guernsey at www.gosha.org.gg. The HSE's website, in particular, contains lots of helpful guidance. It is worth browsing through them from time to time. There is guidance for small businesses, guidance by subject (such

as asbestos – Guernsey's biggest workplace killer – which is in most buildings constructed up to 1999 when it was banned) and guidance for industry sectors.

Guernsey has a number of specific guidance documents and sector specific law, such as the Construction Approved Code of Practice, but we do not have the numerous guidance and legal documents issued by the UK Government in conjunction with the Health & Safety Executive in the UK. However, if an incident occurs in a Guernsey workplace, the HSE in Guernsey has advised that it will use UK guidance as evidence of the adoption of good practice when judging the implementation of acceptable practices in a Guernsey workplace should an accident or other incident occur here and specific local guidance has not been issued.

The 2007 Guernsey Workplace Health & Safety Ordinance (The Health and Safety at Work (General) (Guernsey) Ordinance 1987) is as robust in its effect as the UK's Health & Safety at Work Act 1974. Some say that is not the case, some even say there is no robust health and safety law in Guernsey. But they are wrong and the consequences of ignoring our law or not implementing it are significant and severe – don't be caught out, be aware of what is needed in your sector and your business and maintain a safe working environment for everyone who may be affected by it. And if you employ five or more employees, remember it is the law for the health and safety poster to be placed on a noticeboard seen by all employees in a place of employment. Scan the QR code below or use the link: <https://gov.gg/CHP/finder>. Use the 10420304p-8

Please download the poster and put it up in your workplace. Please don't ignore or disregard the benefits that proactive, sensible health and safety management can make to your business and remember, it's the law in Guernsey. And come along to Gosha events and site visits which demonstrate how good workplace practices can be implemented cost-effectively, safely, proactively and sensibly.



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