

The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)

The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 (HASAWA) details that we all as individuals have a responsibility towards health & safety.

The Health & Safety at Work Act (1974) is law and any infringement may result in legal action carried out by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE).

This act places a strict duty on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe working conditions and the absence of risks to health in connection with the use, handling storage and transport of articles and substances. The Act places a statutory duty on employers to have a declared safety policy for a business in which more than five people are employed.

Employers must offer employees:

- safe place of work
- safe working practices
- safe equipment e.g. tools etc
- personal protective equipment to be supplied free of charge (where necessary)
- safe accesses to and from (egress) your place of work
- risk assessments
- an emergency procedure, to include the evacuation from gas & fire exposure and what to do if asbestos is found on site etc
- general safety policy.

Employees must:

- take care and not to injure yourself and others
- not misuse or break any equipment, tools and health & safety equipment etc
- co-operate with their employer with regards to health & safety
- refrain from using any piece of equipment that they are not trained to use correctly and safely.

Work locations

Employers are required to operate within the requirements of HASAWA and this typically means that several people within an organisation may have some level of direct responsibility towards health and safety, such as:

- Company Health & Safety Advisor.
- Company Health & Safety Committees.

- Work area supervisors.
- HR & education departments.
- The Managing director.

The specific requirements in certain areas are that:

- accommodation must be adequately lit and ventilated
- fittings, furnishings and flooring must be durable and easily cleanable
- changing and washing facilities must be adequate and available
- a staff room with appropriate facilities should be available.

There are several identifiable areas of risk that an employer should address.

These include:

- chemical: any chemicals that may be hazardous, poisonous, flammable or toxic
- electrical: all electrical equipment should be regularly checked – leads and plugs should be safe and sockets should not be overloaded
- biological: this is particularly important in a clinical laboratory
- physical: lifting and handling training should be available and is usually mandatory
- fire.

Company Health & Safety Advisor

A specific person employed with responsibility to ensure that the company is kept up to date with all new and current legislation and best practice codes of conduct in relation to Health & Safety. The advisor may also be responsible for the formation of Health & Safety assessments and procedure guides for the undertaking of any specific required task.

Company Health & Safety committees

Some companies may have a committee that meets once or several times a year to discuss Health & Safety. This committee may also individuals the chances to voice their own opinion with regards to specific tasks and potential new areas of risk.

The committee may also advise the Health & Safety Advisor of any new business change that may be due and the impact that any new role may cause the operation of company.

Health & Safety committees may also discuss any items that could be classed as a 'near miss', where an accident was avoided at the last minute or any items that may fall under RIDDOR regulations.

Work area supervisors

It may be required within some companies that a work area supervisor undertakes specific role training for an individual on how to perform certain tasks which may include the use of machinery or power tools. No employee should ever be asked to use a piece of machinery or equipment unless they are trained to do so by a competent person.

If work place training is to be given by a work place supervisor that training must include notification of first aid areas and qualified first aid staff. If any chemicals are to be used with any type of work the individual should be explained the requirements of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) regulations.

Human resources and education departments

It is important that every employee – be it a full time member of staff, part-time or self employed – is given adequate advice and guidance on the importance of Health & Safety. Most companies operate an induction course that you are required to attend, and it is here that the company policy on Health & Safety is explained.

The human resources and / or the education department will then offer any training that is required for an individual to perform a task, following the guidelines put in place by the Health & Safety manager.

The managing director

The chairman or managing director of any organisation takes on the responsibility of Health & Safety because, ultimately, they are the person with overall total responsibility of Health & Safety for every visitor and employee who their business comes into contact with, no matter if they contact is direct or indirect.