

# Keeping Health & Safety Simple in a Complicated World

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The HSE website has a number of pages related to keeping health and simple but rather than repeat what many will already have read and seen Geoff wanted to draw attention to why this is so important.

## **Role of the inspector as regulator**

The role of an inspector and his team is that of a regulator, undertaking inspections and investigations and applying the law to the circumstances they find.

The role is quite different from that of a health and safety officer, manager or consultant, which requires a wholly different skill set with the added pressures of needing to satisfy management boards, contain health and safety capital expenditure and cope with extra responsibilities, such as environmental issues.

## **Role of the health and safety professional**

Having been seconded to a large manufacturing organisation as part of his earlier development, Geoff was able to witness and appreciate those pressures first-hand and gave recognition to the fine job that health and safety professionals often work in challenging circumstances. Geoff acknowledged, in particular, the significant amount of effort required, and often underestimated, to put good health and safety systems into organisations.

Geoff stated that the job of the professionals is often underrated yet is critical to the health, safety and well-being of the workforce. They are often up against the unhelpful 'health and safety gone mad' culture where health and safety is seen as an impediment to work. Whilst not as bad as it used to be, there is still some way to go to alleviate these prejudices.



## Keeping Health & Safety Simple in a Complicated World

*Continued*

### **Health and safety procedures and guidance**

Health and safety is perceived as a complicated topic requiring detailed and burdensome processes and procedures. It must be remembered that controlling risk is not a simple matter as issues cannot be dealt with in isolation. Controls introduced to reduce risks in one area can have consequences for another.

### **Guidance for workers**

Many bodies such as HSL, BHSEA, IOSH, HSE produce a great deal of guidance for professionals. However, in raising the professionalism of the health and safety role the language of the guidance has become more appropriate to those writing the procedures than those required to follow them ie the workers on the shopfloor. It is often forgotten that those workers need clear, concise and relevant instructions, written in simple language, close to where that information is required eg attached to the actual equipment being used. A lengthy health and safety procedures manual in an office somewhere on site is not going to keep those workers safe.

### **Riddor and accident reporting**

Geoff commented that the vast majority of RIDDOR reports follow the same stilted format:

- "The person was trained"
- "They had not followed the agreed system of work"
- "They acknowledged they should not have taken the action that led to the accident"

There seems to be an almost disbelief that, despite all the processes being in place, the accident still occurred.

Following accident investigations, the inspectors may come away with evidential documents, eg written systems of work, training records, training arrangements, risk assessments. All lovingly produced with the addition of spreadsheets, charts, colour coding, and often with abbreviations. Whilst addressing legal obligations and being specific to the complexity and hazards of a particular industry eg nuclear, they are an example of documents which are of no direct relevance to the shopfloor worker, agency workers or contractors.

They may not even be accessible to those workers. Workers who do not have English as their first language or have special needs are particularly at a disadvantage.



## **Keeping Health & Safety Simple in a Complicated World** *Continued*

### **How to keep health and safety simple**

- 'Acting together' – the message of the HSE - is critical to helping Great Britain work well. So long as health and safety is seen as simply the domain of the professionals then it will be difficult to keep everyone safe. It is not, it is the responsibility of everyone in the organisation, at all levels.
- Making the risk assessment reflect the actual job being done.
- Making it accessible to those doing the job, whose health is being directly affected, and written in plain and simple, straightforward language.
- Managing risk well.

### **The current challenge**

Achieving “buy-in” from everyone involved in the health and safety system to keep people healthier, safer and ensure that work is a good place to be and therefore help the country to prosper and grow.

Following Geoff's most interesting presentation, discussion ensued with the overarching theme that a lot of health and safety manuals, often produced by consultants but some also designed to address the requirements of trade bodies were far too lengthy and as a result placed a further burden on the company to understand and disseminate the contents to their workers.

A further comment was made that there are far too many accreditation schemes, which often overlap each other, creating a bureaucratic and financial burden on companies who are tendering for work. It would appear that companies are now asking for more and more information as time goes by, over and above that which the original legislation required.