

# The Health and Safety Reporters Online Teaching Pack Introduction



**In addition to this introductory section on health and safety, this online pack includes the following five units:**

**Health and Safety in Industry**  
**Health and Safety in The Home**  
**Health and Safety with Food**  
**Health and Safety in Transport**  
**Health and Safety at School**

**Before looking at these units, let's consider some background information to the health and safety story.**

## **BACKGROUND TO HEALTH AND SAFETY**

The history of health and safety legislation in Great Britain can be traced back to the beginning of the first factory law in 1802 which was introduced because of the terrible work conditions for children. Over the next 200 years, more and more rules were introduced.

In 1974 the Health and Safety at Work Act (H&SAWA) was made law. This law was created to protect the health and safety of everyone working in or visiting any workplace. It simplified and strengthened previous health and safety laws, placing a legal duty on employers, the self-employed and everyone employed in a workplace to take care of the health and safety of themselves, their workmates and anyone visiting their workplace.

The most widespread result of the H&SAWA is that companies now have to provide 'safe systems of work'. The Act is enforced by both civil and criminal law. Civil law requires a 'duty of care', which means that employers can be prosecuted and employees compensated when a company doesn't provide a safe place for them to work. Criminal law is enforced using health and safety law. If the law is broken, people can be fined, given prison sentences and end up with criminal records.

Here are some of the legal terms used in the Act which will help to explain how the Act was meant to be clearly understood, so that it could work.

**REASONABLY PRACTICABLE:**

the employer has to make a balanced decision about what is possible based on what is cost-effective and the likelihood/severity of a particular problem arising.

**PRACTICABLE:**

decisions must be made based on what is already known; cost is not a consideration.

**SHALL/SHALL NOT:**

when these words are used in law there is an absolute requirement for something to either happen or not happen.

**HAZARD:**

any substance, article, material or practice which has the potential to cause harm to safety, health and welfare of employees at work and others affected by that work.

**RISK:**

the likelihood of something that potentially might happen actually happening.

**COMPETENT PERSON:**

someone who has sufficient training, experience, knowledge and understanding of the work involved, the ability to apply this to the tasks they are given, an understanding of current best practice and most importantly, someone who knows their own limitations.

**It is worth remembering that employers do not need to have an accident in their work place to be in breach of the law.**

**HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE (HSE)**

Today, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is the Government organisation with responsibility for health and safety issues in Great Britain. Their mission statement is:

‘Our mission is to protect people’s health and safety by ensuring risks in the changing workplace are properly controlled. We do this through research, information and advice, new or revised regulations and codes of practice, inspection, investigation and enforcement.’

Here are some figures from the Health and Safety Executive that show how health and safety in the workplace is succeeding and failing.

**KEY ANNUAL FIGURES (HSE 2007/2008)**

**2.1 million people** were suffering from an illness they believed was caused or made worse by their current or past work.

**229 workers** were killed at work.

**136,771 other injuries** to employees were reported under RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations).

**34 million days** were lost overall (1.4 days per worker), 28 million due to work-related ill health and 6 million due to workplace injury.

## STORIES BEHIND THE FIGURES

### Bar staff 'should wear earplugs'

**'Campaigners have attacked the music and entertainment industry for not preparing measures to protect the hearing of bar and club workers. The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) said staff working where loud music was played should wear earplugs.'**

(RNID news release, BBC News Online, May 2007)

### Fat chance this will work

**'The Government's health advisers are urging companies to do more to get their staff on their feet in order to combat a nationwide epidemic of unfitness. A raft of recommendations from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) range from providing bike sheds for those who want to cycle to work to encouraging staff to take the stairs instead of the lift.'**

(Risk 287 December 2006)

### Editor wins £37,000 RSI damages

**'A Guardian newspaper night editor who says she was refused access to the company physiotherapist after developing crippling elbow pain has been paid £37,000 in damages for repetitive strain injury (RSI). Andrea Osborne, who had been a casual at the paper for two and a half years, worked almost exclusively using a mouse, at speed, for an average nine hours at night, and up to 45 hours a week, without a break.'**

(Risks 258 May 2006)

### TUC plan to help disabled people into work

**'Far too few disabled people who want to work are being recruited by employers, and too many disabled employees, including workers who become disabled after being injured at work, are losing their jobs, according to a TUC report.'**

(Risks May 2006)

Health and safety reaches far beyond the workplace, and the material in this pack will help to increase your interest and understanding of how health and safety rules, regulations, recommendations and advice affect everyone, and that includes you!

At one time or another, we are all concerned with our health and safety; when we eat, go to school, travel, stay at home and, in time, go to work. The units in this pack help you to investigate three things:

**When does technology play a part in your health and safety?**

**When is your own health and safety in your own hands?**

**When do you rely on others for your health and safety?**

**Here are five sentences to get you thinking.**

**Science has nothing to do with what's on the shelves at the supermarket.**

**Safety on the roads is 99 per cent technology and 1 per cent common sense.**

**Experiments in the school lab couldn't hurt a fly.**

**I could easily find over 20 health and safety hazards at home.**

**Health and safety regulations are more important in the nuclear industry than at music concerts.**

Now that you've read the sentences, do you agree with any of them? Find out if any of your mates agree with any of them, and get them to explain why. Alternatively, if they don't agree with any of them, can they explain why they don't?