Health and Safety; just how serious are organisations about protecting their staff?

Traditionally, an organisation's understanding of workplace health and safety evolves as events occur over time. Many new employers begin with little or no understanding of workplace hazards, risks or requirements until a worker is injured, becomes ill or, worse still, is killed.

The Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 is a landmark in law. It became law in April 2008 and means that for the first time, companies and organisations can be found guilty of corporate manslaughter as a result of serious system failures resulting in a gross breach of a duty of care.

Facilities Managers traditionally have to manage a number of risks associated with maintaining and operating an occupied building. These risks not only apply to staff, but also outside contractors so it is crucial that potential risks are mitigated to avoid workplace injuries. If organisations fail to do so, they can now face fines under the Act if prosecuted.

The statistics released earlier this year revealed that more than 241 people were killed at work in the UK in 2006/2007 and 141,350 employees were seriously injured. This figure is an increase of 11 per cent on the previous year and is a serious concern for the UK Government. (Source: Health & Safety Executive website)

The new legislation is aimed at cases where management failures occur across the organisation. The new offence considers how activities were organised and managed and therefore looks at the systems and practices for carrying out the company's work, level of employee training and adequacy of equipment, supervision and middle management, strategic approach and arrangements for risk assessing, monitoring

and auditing the processes. Any one or culmination of failings could result in a breach of duty of care and, even worse, a fatality.

“The best safeguard to protect the organisation and its employees, and to avoid prosecution, is getting it right first time, every time,” explains Gomersall. “BS OHSAS 18001 is a recognised method for promoting a safe and healthy working environment by providing a framework that allows the organisation to consistently identify and control its health and safety risks, reduce the potential for accidents, aid legislative compliance and improve overall performance. Implementation of such a management system can also lead to considerable cost-saving and productivity benefits for the business including reduced sickness, absenteeism and reducing the number of claims made to insurance companies.”

A successfully implemented Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) management system affords a logical, comprehensive framework to justify, create and continually improve health and safety program activity. The OHS management system reflects the principles of quality, due diligence and continual improvement and provides for the creation of prevention programs that can be implemented, maintained, documented and verified.

Having a Health and Safety management system will help Facility Management companies to improve the management of their contractors by providing:

- a robust contractor evaluation process
- a consistent approach to contractor management
- greater control and monitoring of contractors once on site

It will also help them with awareness and understanding of the statutory health and safety checks (i.e. LOLER, LEV and Electricity) and ensuring they are effectively fulfilling their responsibilities on behalf of their client.

“The Act is an opportunity for employers to think again about how risks are managed, and for organisations to ensure they are taking proper steps to meet current legal duties. Since April 2008, the Act means that those who disregard the safety of others at work, with fatal consequences, are more vulnerable to very serious criminal charges,” concludes Gomersall.

- ENDS -

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Key annual figures 2007/08

- **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, a rate of 0.8 per 100 000 workers.
- **136 771** other injuries to employees were reported under RIDDOR, a rate of 517.9 per 100 000 employees.
- **299 000** reportable injuries occurred, according to the Labour Force Survey, a rate of 1000 per 100 000 workers.
- **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.

Source: Health & Safety Executive

About BSI Management Systems

BSI Management Systems is one of the world's largest certification bodies, with over 60,000 certified locations and clients in more than 100 countries. Operating through a global network, BSI Management Systems provides assessment, certification and training services in all critical areas of management disciplines including:

- Business continuity
- Environment
- Food safety
- Health & safety
- Information security
- Integrated management
- Quality
- Social accountability
- Sustainable development
- IT service management

BSI Management Systems is part of **BSI group,** a global independent business services organisation that inspires confidence and delivers assurance to customers with standards-based solutions. Originating as the world's first national standards body, the group has over 2,250 staff in more than 50 global offices. The group's key offerings are:

- Development and sale of private, national and international standards and supporting information
- Second and third-party management systems assessment and certification
- Product testing and certification of services and products
- Performance management software solutions
- Training services in support of standards implementation and business best practice

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