

Think about health and safety

What elected members of local
authorities need to know



the heart of
health and safety



What does 'health and safety' mean to you?



This?

Remember that there's much more to health and safety...



Why think about health and safety?

- > Every year in the UK, many lives are lost or ruined by accidents at work
- > In a single recent year, there were **299,000** serious work accidents, including **233 deaths**

How many of these were in the community you're responsible for?

Who's responsible for health and safety in your local authority?

Everyone!

- > The employer – overall responsibility for health and safety
- > The chief executive – responsibility for implementing and managing the health and safety strategy and policy for the authority
- > Line managers – day to day responsibility for themselves, their employees and others, including members of the public
- > Employees – responsibility for themselves and others



Your
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Your role as an elected member

What you say, do and decide can have a real impact on the health and safety standards of your:

- > workers
- > contractors
- > suppliers
- > service users
- > customers

Ask yourself...

- > Do I know enough about health and safety and the risks that people face in my authority?
- > Do I understand the health and safety issues in the service areas I'm involved with?
- > Has my authority set the right health and safety strategy and budget?
- > Do I show commitment to health and safety when I talk to people in the service teams?
- > Have any decisions I've made as an elected member put people at risk?

When things go wrong – the law



- > As an employer, your authority has a legal duty to protect its workers and contractors, as well as the public
- > If your authority breaks health and safety law, it could be prosecuted or issued with an improvement or prohibition notice
- > If someone is killed, injured or made ill by their work, or a member of the public is harmed because of your authority's negligence, it could be taken to court

When things go wrong – the cost of accidents

You may have insurance to cover the cost of accidents, but you'll have to pay the indirect costs. These are often greater and include:



- > sick pay
- > extra wages or overtime
- > fines and legal costs
- > repairing damage to machines, equipment or property
- > increased insurance premiums

When things go wrong – the cost of ill health

Work-related ill health caused by common illnesses and medical conditions can:

- > reduce productivity
- > increase the cost of hiring new staff
- > result in civil claims or retirements with enhanced benefits

These will all have an impact on your budget

When things go wrong – the cost of ill health

- > The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development estimates that for local government sickness absence costs over £584 per worker per year
- > The biggest single cause of absence in local government is attributed to common mental health problems including anxiety, stress and depression, accounting for around 23 per cent of all days off work

The case of Barrow Borough Council

- > In 2002, an outbreak of legionnaire's disease at an arts and leisure centre run by Barrow led to **seven deaths**
- > The Council was fined **£125,000** plus **£90,000** costs
- > The design services manager was personally fined **£15,000**



The case of Barrow Borough Council

The judge said:

“The failings... went all the way... to the top of the council in terms of its serving officers. It is likely they went beyond the officers to the councillors, because there is no evidence that there was proper attention given to health and safety within the borough”

Council leader Bill Joughin admitted:

“We had policies written on paper but... it was not part of the culture of the organisation, and there was no chain of command. We ticked all the boxes, but there was not a procedure which ensured it was all adhered to”

Other recent cases

- > A borough council was fined **£400,000** and costs of **£30,000** after a contractor died as a result of being electrocuted
- > A city council was fined **£125,000** plus **£40,000** costs after a refuse lorry killed an 11-year-old
- > A county borough council was fined **£60,000** plus **£22,000** costs after poor maintenance and training were blamed for the death of a man in a care home

Getting health and safety right...

- > saves lives
- > keeps people from harm
- > improves morale among the workforce
- > saves money
- > improves efficiency
- > sends out a positive message to others, including employees, contractors and the electorate
- > sets a good example

How can you help to get health and safety right?

Policy

Make sure your authority has a policy that:

- > defines the structure of health and safety risk management
- > says how it should function
- > identifies the people who have specific roles and responsibilities
- > is communicated to all employees
- > is reviewed periodically

How can you help to get health and safety right?

Management

It's recommended that your cabinet or executive should:

- > set targets for reducing injuries and ill health
- > get reports on specific incidents or accidents
- > get regular reports on health and safety performance
- > report publicly on health and safety performance

How can you help to get health and safety right?

Advice

Make sure you and your authority get:

- > the right advice from competent health and safety professionals
- > sound occupational health advice

How can you help to get health and safety right?

Training

- > Training makes people safer and reduces accidents and incidents
- > Everyone needs some form of health and safety training:
 - > elected members need to know their broad strategic responsibilities and recognise the resources needed
 - > managers and supervisors need training to help them plan work safely and understand the implications if they don't
 - > 'frontline' employees need basic training, eg on safe systems of work

How can you help to get health and safety right?

Sensible risk management

... isn't about:

- > stopping activities for trivial reasons and where the risks have been assessed
- > generating useless paperwork
- > creating a totally risk-free environment
- > scaring people by exaggerating trivial risks



Does your authority make decisions based on the fear of litigation or on the basis of real risk?

How can you help to get health and safety right?

Sensible risk management

... is about:

- > protecting workers and the public
- > balancing benefits and risks – reducing risks that have serious consequences and those that come up more often
- > making sure that those who create risks manage them responsibly
- > helping people understand that, as well as having a right to protection, they have to take responsibility for themselves and others

What are the major health and safety issues in your authority?

- > Construction
- > Transport
- > Fire
- > Mental health problems
- > Musculoskeletal injuries
- > Waste management

What can **you** do about these issues?

Remember...

- > Health and safety is part of everything you do
- > Health and safety is relevant to every department in your authority, and to every activity

