

Continuing a culture of safety

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Statistics show a downwards trend for the number of workplace injuries and an 85% reduction in fatal injuries since 1974.

Incidents nowadays tend not to arise from defective equipment or lack of written procedures, but more from human error or a failure to follow procedures due to either complacency or a failure to adequately train and supervise employee; hence the reduction in the speed of decrease in workplace injuries and the plateauing in relation to fatalities at work.

Businesses are therefore approaching health and safety improvements not so much from physical changes to the workplace, although that is still important and relevant, but from the human perspective of encouraging employee buy-in to safety by creating and maintaining a safety culture which is adopted from the Board to the shop-floor.

Without being too prescriptive, the following are a few factors which indicate that a safety culture exists

Leadership

Is there visible commitment to safety by management, for example, regular, useful visits to site, a willingness to stop production for safety reasons and the provision of sufficient safety resources (both time and money)?

Communication

Is there good internal communication with clear and concise written materials, effective briefings and safety meetings and a willingness to be challenged and tested?

Employee involvement

Is there active participation of employees with consultation on health and safety issues, an encouragement for employees to be health and safety guardians and, importantly, both the respect for matters aired and feedback.

Learning culture

Is there a willingness of the business to learn, with employees willing and encouraged to contribute ideas for safety improvements?

Attitude towards blame

Is the attitude one of accountability not blame?

The idea of a safety culture in the workplace is not new, indeed the lack of one can become an aggravating factor should a business be investigated and prosecuted for health and safety breaches, but it is effective and will help prevent incidents in the workplace and assist in the UK's current good record in health and safety matters improve.

As was stated succinctly by the Bard, "*I would give all my fame for a pot of ale and safety*".

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