

SEGMENT THREE - Accidents and Illness

After studying this segment you should have a greater understanding of the principles of accident prevention and some of the causes of ill health at work.

AIMS OF THE SEGMENT

The main aim of this segment is to help you to understand the principles of accident prevention and the avoidance of work-related ill health and be able to:

- Define the term accident;
- State the main effects of stress and give examples of how it can be reduced;
- State how alcohol and drugs can effect safety at work and how risks can be minimised;
- Explain the importance of complying with policies on smoking;
- State that incidents of violence must be reported and give examples of how the likelihood can be reduced;
- State the reasons for accidents to be recorded, and the legal requirements for accident reporting.

WHEN IS AN ACCIDENT AN ACCIDENT?

In general life we commonly say “it was an accident” when something happens that we didn’t intend to happen. I suppose you could say that you didn’t plan for it to happen.

Well, in health & safety, an accident is very similar and we define it as:

- An unplanned event that leads to injury or loss.
- Related to accidents are incidents
- An incident is an unplanned event that nearly led to injury or loss.

Let’s have a look at these two statements in more detail.

Unplanned

Simply, this is something that you did not intend or want to happen. A simple example could be dropping a tool while working from a height. But, even when you plan on doing something, like switching on an item of equipment, if you didn’t know that there was someone working on the equipment, then that would make it an unplanned event.

It's the fact that something unexpected happens that makes it unplanned.

Injury

By injury we include the usual range of minor and more serious injuries, everything from a minor sprain or cut, through to life threatening injuries. We also include ill-health. Accidents can as easily cause longer term ill-health as shorter term injuries.

Most employers in the UK are required to keep an accident record book and even if your employer is too small (under 10 employees) to be required to do this, it is still good practice to have and use one.

Many accidents and incidents are serious enough to be reported to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) or local environmental health officers (EHO).

In general, accidents that require **employees** to be off work for more than **7 consecutive days** must be reported to the HSE. Also accidents that require **hospital treatment**, although just going to hospital is not enough.

Loss

Loss refers to damage to equipment and plant, downtime, lost production etc.

Nearly

This is the word that divides accidents from incidents. By nearly, I mean the injury or loss didn't happen but it could easily have happened.

Let's go back to our previous example. While working from a height, you accidentally drop a hammer, which falls down to the ground. If the hammer didn't hit anyone or cause damage then it is an incident. This is what we would call a near miss, especially if there were people working below you and the hammer nearly hit someone!

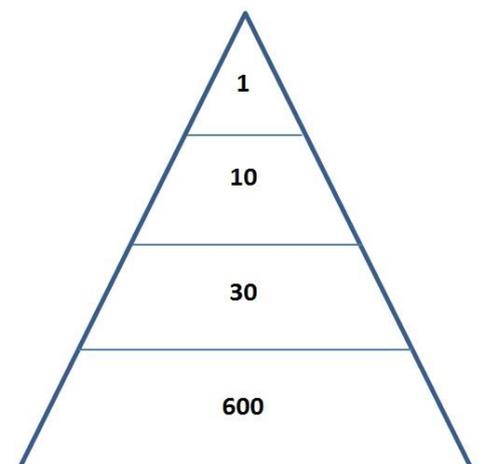
As I have said, there are many accidents and incidents that have to be reported. It is also important that accidents and incidents are investigated, to find out why they happened and how they could have been avoided.

Why Investigate Accidents and Incidents?

It has been found that on average for every 641 accidents and incidents we have:

- 1 instance of serious injury or death;
- 10 instances of minor injuries;
- 30 instances of only damage being caused;
- 600 near misses

As it is often only luck that separates a near miss from something much more serious, you can see the reason why all accidents and incidents should be looked at closely.



If that falling hammer only bounced off the ground then no harm was done. If it had hit someone on the head, someone not wearing a hard hat, then the consequences

could have been much more serious.

Investigating accidents is a process that should be approached in a careful and systematic way. Investigations usually identify that the accident (or incident) was brought about by either an **unsafe activity** or by an **unsafe condition**.

In simple terms, either someone did something wrong or some thing contributed to the problem. Examples of unsafe activities and conditions include:

Unsafe Activities	Unsafe Conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climbing to a height • Touching an electrical cable • Removing a guard from machinery • Running with a knife • Incorrect lifting of a heavy load • Pouring wet chips into hot fat • Diluting concentrated cleaning chemicals • Not following the correct procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poorly maintained ladder • Cable live and insulation cracked • Machinery not isolated or still operating • Slippery floor, other people around • Poorly maintained lifting equipment • Too much water, fat too hot • Not wearing PPE, not adding chemical to water (safest way) • Poor training of staff in procedures

I'm sure you have examples from your own work that you can add below.

SAQ Please list four examples of possibly unsafe activities and four unsafe conditions that could occur in your workplace.

Possible Unsafe Activities

Possible Unsafe Conditions

Once we know what happened, we can think about why it happened and how to avoid it.

Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR)

Incidents and accidents that occur because of work or in connection with work may have to be reported under RIDDOR to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) if:

1. Death, major injury or injury (requiring hospital treatment) to member of public;
2. The employee is absent from work for more than seven consecutive days;
3. A specified occurrence or disease is the result.

RIDDOR specifies who must make the report and how the report must be made (usually to the HSE online reporting system). If you are an employer then you must be aware of your responsibilities under this Regulation.

STRESS AT WORK

It's not just accidents at work that can cause problems for workers. Stress is increasingly recognised as a major factor in long term illness in the workplace.

The HSE thinks of stress as the adverse reaction that people have to the excessive pressures and other demands that are placed on them.

A little pressure at work can be a good thing, as it provides a challenge and can be stimulating and add interest. However, too much can lead to poor performance and even worse.

Examples of the Effects of Stress

If we look at typical examples of what work-related stress can cause, then we will have a better understanding of what stress can and can not cause and how we can deal with it.

- Increased heart rate
- Sweating – not caused by being too warm
- Headaches
- Aching muscles, particularly in upper limbs and the back
- Dizziness
- Blurred eyesight
- Greater likelihood to suffer from minor ailments
- Depression
- Anxiousness
- Irritability and mood swings
- Panic attacks and lack of confidence

So, how do we deal with stress in the workplace?

It would be very tempting to decide that we wait until someone starts to show the symptoms of stress and then look at what can be done, but this is not the right way to go about it.

Employers should now accept that stress is a real possibility in their workplace and they should tackle the possible causes of stress even if no-one has yet shown any

symptoms.

The HSE recommends that employers carry out a Risk Assessment to look at the various **factors** that can cause stress and then consider what **controls** should be put into effect.

The Seven Factors

HSE list seven factors that can lead to stress in the workplace.

- **The Company Culture** is factor #1. Companies that have a 'blame culture', do not consult meaningfully with workers, have poor communications, do not sort out problems with working and treat their workers poorly are likely to have a culture that can lead to stress.
- **The Working Environment** (#2). Working conditions that are too cold or too hot, poor lighting, ventilation and humidity can all contribute to stress. Lack of space to work in and isolation from other people should all be assessed.
- **The Demands of Work** (#3). The third factor to consider is the control workers have over their work or more usually the lack of control.



A common example of this is working on a production line where you have no control over the pace at which you have to work. Even the Managing Director of your company can feel they have no control over their working life and so be at risk from stress.

Too much work can cause stress, no surprise there. But, too little work can also cause stress. Work that is too difficult, too boring and monotonous, unrealistic targets and insufficient time to finish the work can also cause people to feel stressed.

- **Relationships with Colleagues** (#4). We interact with our colleagues in a number of ways, some of them positive and supportive and occasionally some of them negative. Examples of negative relationships include:
 1. bullying and harassment;
 2. discrimination;
 3. peer pressure to reach performance and production targets.
- **Change** (#5). The fifth factor to take into account when assessing stress factors at work is change.

It has been said of modern life that the only constant thing is change. That may very well be true but that doesn't mean that we are all able to deal with change effectively. Changes in working patterns, equipment, restructuring and feelings of job insecurity

can all lead to stress.

- **Job Role (#6).** If you are unsure of your role within your company or have conflicting roles, or even two different jobs then the stresses and strains of balancing these conflicting situations can contribute to the effects of stress.
- **Support (#7).** The final factor is one of Support. This is both a possible factor contributing to stress in the workplace and an effective control measure.

There are also external factors that may need to be considered. Problems at home or problems with the balance between time at work and time at home (work/life balance) can also contribute and may need to be considered.

Once these factors have been considered and the risks of stress assessed it is possible to take considered and appropriate steps to manage and control stress.

MANAGING STRESS

To effectively manage stress and to be able to demonstrate that your company is managing stress they should have the following in place:

- **Risk Assessments** for stress;
- A **Policy** for managing stress;
- Effective staff **communication** and **consultation** within the company;
- Well defined **roles** and responsibilities;
- Well trained and **competent** staff;
- Appropriate **working patterns** and work targets;
- A willingness by **management** to treat stress as an important health risk;
- A system for **reporting** stress and providing **support** and **counselling**.

One thing that is likely to cause stress at work is violence or the threat of violence and this is something that has to be taken very seriously.

VIOLENCE AT WORK

This includes actual acts of violence or threats of violence, abuse (verbal or otherwise) in circumstances related to work. We hear increasingly in the News Media about occupations and workers that seem threatened with violence. Doctors and Nurses, Bus Drivers, Shop Workers and Teachers would all come readily to mind if I asked you to list occupations that may be subject to violence at work. The one thing they all have in common is that they regularly come into contact with (people who are not colleagues) members of the public. That's not to say that violence does not happen between colleagues, it often does.

But whether the violence is from someone you work with or a complete stranger you are serving as part of your job – **it is never acceptable**.

Violence at work should always be reported directly to your employer and in certain circumstances your employer will have to make an official report under RIDDOR.

Although there are no specific regulations regarding violence at work, it does come

under the employers' responsibility to the health, safety and welfare of employees¹ and also the employers' responsibility to carry out appropriate risk assessments.

The whole issue of the management and control of violence at work is too complicated to deal with in this training pack, but it is important we look at ways of reducing the possibility of it happening.

The most appropriate type of control will depend upon the nature of the risk and also the nature of your business.

Both Bank workers and Building Society workers are at risk of violence because of the large amounts of cash they deal with and hold on the premises. Banks respond to this by using physical barriers to shield workers from the public and possible armed robbery. Building Societies however, are more likely to use a counter as a partial barrier, while the Bank relies on a complete barrier of wood and glass. Perhaps this is because Building Societies want to present a more customer friendly face and have assessed the risks differently.

Other common controls include:

- train employees to spot early signs of aggression and how to deal with it;
- identify customers with a previous history of aggression;
- provide more comfortable seating areas and better lighting for customers ;
- design some of the risks out of the job – use credit cards instead of cash;
- do not keep large amounts of cash on site – pay wages by bank transfer not cash;
- have in place appropriate procedures for meeting clients away from the workplace;
- avoid lone working, particularly late at night;
- use appropriate physical barriers between you and the potential aggressor.

Have you ever thought how effective a fish and chip shop counter is as a barrier between the staff and possibly aggressive customers?

¹ Health & Safety at Work Act 1974

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL AT WORK

In our modern world alcohol and drugs are common causes of aggressive behaviour and violence at work. They are also often the cause, or at least a contribution to the cause, of accidents.

It is a fact that the consumption of alcohol and the use of many drugs (prescription medicines or illicit drugs) contributes to accidents and incidents at work.

Alcohol, even in small quantities, affects your ability to understand risk and reduces your capacity to respond in an emergency.

Alcohol will increase the time you take to react to situations and will reduce your ability to accurately control your movements. Some drugs and prescription medicines will have similar effects to alcohol, while others may have more subtle but just as dangerous effects.

There are obvious examples in the seafood industry. Who would want a forklift truck driver, fish filleter, bandsaw operator or skipper of a vessel who had a few drinks too many? But it's not as simple as that. What about a maintenance engineer, cleaner or wages clerk whose judgment was clouded by alcohol, or who couldn't concentrate properly, because they had a bad hangover?

In the UK alone, it is estimated that the NHS spends more than £200m a year on treating work-related alcohol and drug problems.

More than 14 million working days are lost each year and the overall cost to UK industry amounts to more than £2,000,000,000 (£2bn) for alcohol problems at work and more than £1,300,000,000 (£1.3bn) for drug related accidents and ill-health at work.

This is the equivalent of more than £55 per year for every man, woman and child in the UK.

Controlling the Risks

If alcohol and/or drugs are likely to cause a risk to health & safety in your workplace then your employer has a responsibility to control that risk.

Control almost certainly involves an effective Risk Assessment and a properly formulated and enforced policy.

The policy will probably ban the consumption of alcohol on the premises and may even issue instructions on alcohol consumption during working hours, including lunch breaks. Many occupations are also subject to the possibility of random alcohol and drug testing.

SMOKING POLICIES AND HEALTH & SAFETY

Your employer has a responsibility to ensure a safe and healthy workplace and it is this responsibility that has led many employers to ban or restrict smoking at work.



The arguments are simple. A working environment containing tobacco smoke poses a risk to non smokers – what is commonly called passive smoking. It is possible to use ventilation to remove this smoke and reduce the risk to workers.

However health & safety practice (and the Law for that matter) states that if it is practical to eliminate a risk, then it should be removed. If it is not practical to remove the risk then it should be controlled. This means that employers are obliged to remove the risk (ban smoking) rather than control it (ventilation).

There are other very good reasons for having a policy on smoking, other than the health risks to employees.

Some occupations present other dangers such as the presence of combustible materials and the risk of fires from cigarettes and lighters. Another good reason for controlling smoking is food safety. Smoking is no longer allowed in fish markets and the sight of a fish filleter smoking while cutting fish is one that is consigned to the history books.

Whatever your views on smoking I hope I have explained the reasons why employers should have a policy on smoking, why they need to enforce it and the importance of you and your colleagues complying with it.