Q & A from Health and Safety Webinar 7th May

1. Risk assessments

Q: Is there any specific guidance on the level of detail that must be included?

A: The HSENI has produced a template risk assessment for small businesses, see link:

https://www.hseni.gov.uk/publications/example-covid-19-risk-assessment-template

Good record keeping to monitor implementation of health and safety measures is key.

Q: Do companies have to do a risk assessment per machine or per process?

A: For larger operations, the risk assessment should be more comprehensive taking into account all operations which would include processes and machinery specific to a particular premise.

If you are repurposing production, you must consider the health and safety implications for new machinery / new substances / new premise and any other risks identified within the assessment.

2. Temperature checking

Q: Is it compulsory to temperature check to see if someone has a raised temperature?

A: Temperature checking is not compulsory. Some businesses are carrying out temperature checking as a control measure to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 spread.

If you do wish to carry out temperature checking, as it is invasive, it is important to obtain appropriate advice as employees have data protection and privacy rights. You will need to obtain employee consent and provide various information in line with GDPR.

Q: If an employee becomes unwell while at the workplace, who is responsible for getting them home if they are sharing lifts / have a company vehicle?

A: There is no formal guidance on this practicality and there is no strict obligation to take employees home so it is really a judgment call. Practically, if you have provided transport to work, you might want to take them home again but appreciate that this may not always be possible. If they are arranging their own travel, it may be that you consider that they should make their own arrangements to go home. It is important to note that you will want to foster positive relationships with employees.

3. Health monitoring

Q: What, if any, additional measures have been taken around employee well-being e.g. Health Monitoring?

A: There is no formal guidance on this issue other than reporting procedures regarding symptoms and concerns. Measures which can be taken to support employees include remote team meetings for example in order that employees can raise any issues which they are experiencing.

Some workplaces are providing remote mental health workshops, yoga and Pilates classes.

4. **Health and safety for homeworkers**

Q: Is there standard guidance for home-workers?

A: Your health and safety obligations extend to homeworkers. The extent of what you need to do will be largely dictated by the duration of the homeworking (short-term versus long-term) and what the employees are doing at home. If computers are being used, the Health ad Safety (Display Screen Equipment) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 1992 will apply.

Common measures introduced would include desktop questionnaires and ensuring proper equipment is provided.

5. **PPE Equipment**

Q: How can we ensure we follow Health & Safety guidelines moving forward when we cannot get these items?

A: The requirement for PPE should be determined by the result of risk assessment. As yet, there is no official guidance on non-clinical setting PPE but this may change.

Giving out PPE without a considered risk assessment will not satisfy your health and safety obligations. PPE should be used as a last resort and specific for an intended purpose.

The message is that if a business cannot operate whilst adhering to social-distancing guidelines then it should not operate.

Q: Should we supply everyone with face visors for example?

A: The UK does not currently advise use of face masks outside of care settings, in line with PPE guidance. See link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19#use-of-face-masks-in-the-community

6. **Food vending machines**

Q: Should food vending machines be removed?

A: There is no obligation to do this nor does the guidance state this. Consideration should be given to the operation and whether it is a necessity. Anything which causes a queue should be considered. Given that a vending machine would present a frequent touchpoint and if they are being used out of necessity, then they should be cleaned frequently. Alternatives of course include ensuring that employees bring packed lunches.

7. **Employee concerns**

Q: If an employee feels that it is not safe to work, what should we do?

A: Ideally, you want to gain the hearts and minds of employees and consult with them comprehensively as to the risks and the policies and procedures being implemented to minimise the risk. Good communication with The Trade Unions is also vital.

Putting in place good cross functional and cleaning teams who meet daily, instils a feeling of reassurance and confidence within the workforce.

If an employee raises specific concerns, the business should of course consider the concerns raised, reassure the employee and see what they can do to remedy the situation.

Induction training when the staff returns to work is a good idea to ensure that all health and safety measures are properly understood.

Phasing staff back to trial measures while also ensuring good feedback to make adjustments or improvements where necessary.

8. Social distancing

Q: What measures have been taken to introduce social distancing into the workplace?

A: Various measures have been taken including physical demarcation and barriers, perspex screens, separating out of plant and machinery, closing common areas etc the required measures will really be determined by the nature of your business.

Q: What is the guidance when two operatives cannot stay 2m apart for the full day. i.e. when one operative needs to hold an item for the other?

A: The guidance is that individuals are 2 metres apart where possible. If there are essential tasks that must be carried out that mean this is not possible, proper consideration should be given to whether there is another way for these tasks to be carried out and whether it is a real necessity that they are carried out.

If there is not, consideration should be given to what control measures you can introduce appreciating that there are occasions where 2 metres social distancing is not possible. Again, control measures should be dictated by the risk assessment.

9. Visual signs

Q: Are there any tips for floor / wall markings etc.?

A: Please refer to Brian Irwin's presentation which shows good examples of signage and demarcation.

Signage should indicate 2 metres distancing. This could range from taping distances or physical barriers depending on the setting.